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PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS

UPON EVERY VERSE OF THE

BOOK OF GENESIS

With a Preface

BY THE RT. REV. EDWARD KING, D.D.

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'In Libris Sanctis intueri oportet quæ ibi æterna intimentur, quæ facta narrentur, quæ futura prænuntientur, quæ agenda præcipiantur vel moneantur.'
—S. AUG. *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Lib. I. c. 1.

'Cum Divinos Libros legimus, in tantâ multitudine verorum intellectuum qui de paucis verbis eruuntur et sanitate Catholicæ fidei muniuntur, id potissimum deligamus quod certum apparuerit cum sensisse quem legimus: si autem hoc latet, id certe quod circumstantia Scripturæ non impedit et cum sana fide concordat: si autem et Scripturæ circumstantia pertractari et discuti non potest, saltem id solum quod fides sana præscribit.'—S. AUG. *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Lib. I. c. 21.

'Une critique sçavante et exacte de la lettre de l'Ecriture a son usage dans les occasions—mais il est utile et nécessaire en tout temps, en tous lieux, et à toutes sortes de personnes d'en étudier et d'en connoître l'esprit, la piété, et les mystères.'—QUESNEL on 1st Cor. xiv. 5.

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THESE
REFLECTIONS UPON THE BOOK OF GENESIS
ARE DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR TO
DR. LIDDON'S DEAR AND SACRED MEMORY
WITH THE GRATITUDE OF
EARLIER AND OF LATTER DAYS

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Preface

IT would seem to the writer of this preface to be enough to say that the author of these 'Reflections on the Book of Genesis' is the same as the author of those similar works on the Psalms and the New Testament, to which Dr. Liddon gave in each case his *imprimatur*. To those who had the rare and responsible delight of Dr. Liddon's friendship, or who knew his writings, that former approval of his would surely be sufficient. But as this book may come into the hands of some who have not yet seen the other 'Practical Reflections,' it may be well to mention shortly some of the chief characteristics of the present volume.

Those who take up the book with a view to obtaining specific information on the discoveries made or the theories suggested by modern criticism will be disappointed. The author puts all such alluring questions aside with a firm hand. Not that he would wish to disparage knowledge of any kind, or fear the conclusions to which the right use of man's reason might lead him. He would gladly and gratefully acknowledge the many benefits gained for the study of the Scriptures by the labours of scholars and historians,

and of those who have searched into the religions of other nations and ages. At the same time he would, we apprehend, desire to remind us that all such studies should be subordinate to the real object for which the Holy Scriptures should be read ; and to recall to our mind those brave and lofty words of Bishop Butler, ‘ Revelation indeed considers the common affairs of this world, and what is going on in it, as a mere scene of distraction, and cannot be supposed to concern itself with foretelling at what time Rome, or Babylon, or Greece, or any particular place, should be the most conspicuous seat of that tyranny and dissoluteness which all places equally aspire to be ; cannot, I say, be supposed to give any account of this wild scene for its own sake.’¹ Lofty words which may have influenced the mind of the keen though gentle author of *The Christian Year* when he wrote—

‘ The giant forms of empires on their way
To ruin : one by one
They tower and they are gone.’²

Indeed, when we think of some of the theories which have been suggested of late years with regard to the Old Testament history, we cannot refrain from quoting Bishop Butler’s words once more : ‘ It is to be added, that the most

¹ Butler’s *Analogy*, Part II. ch. vii. § 30, p. 260, Oxford Edition, 1849.

² *The Christian Year*—Second Sunday after Easter.

obvious, the most easy and direct account of this history, how it came to be written and to be received in the world as a true history, is that *it really is so*.¹

If we turn to the more positive characteristics of these 'Reflections,' we might take S. Luke xxiv. 45 and 27, as our guide: 'Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures,' 'And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.'

These passages imply the need of supernatural assistance to understand the Scriptures rightly. 'He opened their understanding.' 'No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.'² And they show that the Saviour's own way of expounding the Old Testament was to point out in it 'the things concerning Himself.' This was the way in which 'those wonderful interpreters of Holy Scripture, the ancient Fathers and teachers of the Church,'³ explained it. This was S. Augustine's principle of interpretation: 'The New Testament lies enfolded in the Old, the Old Testament is unfolded in the New.'

It was in this spirit that my saintly and learned predecessor in this See commenced and carried through his wonderful undertaking of commenting on the whole Bible. Whatever may be thought of the exegetical merits of that

¹ *Analogy*, Part II. ch. vii. § 5, p. 239.

² 1 Cor. xii. 3.

³ Milman's *Love of the Atonement*, Preface, p. iii.

work in relation to the difficulties of particular texts, the value of the spirit of the interpretation, and of the general effect of the teaching in the Prolegomena to the several Books, read together, is beyond words; as maintaining the cardinal truth 'that both Testaments are from one and the same Divine Hand, and form one harmonious whole.'¹ A precious truth, indeed, which I am thankful to find thus recognised by a learned writer of the modern school. 'No other literature,' says Professor Kirkpatrick, 'is linked into one whole like this, instinct with one spirit and purpose.'² 'For what is the Old Testament from the Christian point of view—and from no other point of view can it be rightly understood—but the record of God's gradual revelation of Himself to Israel, in His purpose of redeeming love, with a view to the establishment of His universal kingdom? The Incarnation was to be the culminating point of that revelation and that purpose.'³ That the above expresses the mind and purpose of the writer of these 'Reflections' we may certainly gather from his own words on Gen. xxvi. 32: 'In traversing Genesis I move amidst deep wells and springs of truth, many of them half choked up by men's ignorance or rash conjectures. Be it given to me to reverently open up the old truths, find Christ hidden under figures, draw lessons

¹ Bishop Chr. Wordsworth, *Genesis and Exodus*, Preface, p. v.

² *The Divine Library of the Old Testament*, p. 92.

³ P. 93.

and comforts from the old histories. In this world's dry, thirsty journey how welcome to us is Holy Scripture with its openings into thoughts of comfort !'¹

It is obvious that in attempting to draw out the spiritual and figurative teaching of the Old Testament some explanations may seem forcible to one mind which to another will appear weak or fanciful. But this does not to any serious extent detract from the merits of this present volume, which is pervaded throughout by a sound and sober spirit.

The writer purposes rather to select from approved sources than to offer anything of his own ; but so far as his mental bias appears, it is in the direction of Bishop Butler, Dr. Mozley, and Dr. Mansel, giving a marked place, among the things which we should take into account in our search for Truth, to human ignorance. His theological teaching is heartily loyal to the Church of England, and might be characterised as Augustinian : showing a great practical knowledge of the moral difficulties of our present life, and the consequent need of supernatural grace ; with an especial sympathy for the dangers of the young. The references to the Holy Eucharist, as the Divinely appointed channel of grace, and as the Memorial of the One Sacrifice of Calvary, are such as might be expected from his Patristic point of view. It is to be hoped that this volume

¹ P. 147.

may induce some persons, especially among the young, to make the Bible again what it was to so many in former times, their daily companion and guide. We feel convinced that a more careful study of the Holy Scriptures as the revealed method of educating man would be richly rewarded.

In Africa, and other parts of the heathen world, where man is still found in a confessedly rudimentary condition, its value under this aspect is being more and more felt; and the same would apply to us at home. The book of Leviticus, as well as the Sermon on the Mount, has still a practical value in perfecting the moral life of Africa, and England too.

Perhaps, also, we may learn a practical lesson from one of the results of recent criticism. The 'composite' character, as it is called, of many of the books of the Bible might suggest to us to confine our reading (at least, for certain periods) to definite portions of the Great Book; as, for example, the 'Code of holiness,' Leviticus xvii.-xxvi., following on the directions for the great day of Atonement; or one group of the Psalms, such as the Gradual Psalms; or the chapters collected together in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, bearing on the heathen nations; or the Sermon on the Mount; or the Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia. Such portions may be definitely studied for a con

siderable time, with untold advantage, if they are studied with prayer for Divine assistance, and with due reference to the three Commentaries which are within the reach of most of us :—

1. The Commentary of the Book itself; comparing Scripture with Scripture;
2. The Commentary of the Creeds, as the exposition of fundamental doctrine;
3. The ever freshly edited Commentary of our own experience.

One lesson of great importance in these days, when the power of worldliness seems to be on the increase, the author of these Reflections continues to teach us: he conceals his name. Those of us who enjoy the fruit of his labour should not forget to remember him in our prayers; that he may be blessed in himself, and be made through his works a blessing to others. Perhaps the reward which he would desire as much as any would be, that the question of the Psalmist might be raised in many a youthful heart, and answered as the Psalmist answers it :—

‘ WHEREWITHAL SHALL A YOUNG MAN CLEANSE HIS WAY?
EVEN BY RULING HIMSELF AFTER THY WORD!’

E. LINCOLN.

OLD PALACE, LINCOLN,
Ascensiontide 1892.

PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS ON GENESIS

CHAPTER I

1. The creation of heaven and earth, 3. of the light, 6. of the firmament, 9. of the earth separated from the waters, 11. and made fruitful, 14. of the sun, moon, and stars, 20. of fish and fowl, 24. of beasts and cattle, 26. of man in the image of God. 29. Also the appointment of food.

I*N the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

God, Who is in Himself perfectly happy and blessed, stepped forth from His eternal rest, and called into being this universe; and this out of His goodness, not that He needed creatures, but that He desired to impart life and happiness. Here I am amidst great depths, great mysteries. Who God is I only dimly apprehend. What is meant by the act of Creation I know not—how should I conceive the passage from nothing into being? In what far-distant ages was this ‘beginning’ I cannot reckon; but I am deeply persuaded that I move in the presence of a Divine Power, upon Whom I entirely depend, and into Whose great plans my feeble existence comes. Let me steady myself amidst this world’s changes by recalling Whose I am, Who made and sustains me.

2. *And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

O dark, gloomy, and desolate world—no creatures swam in that sea or breathed in that darkness. All was a prey to great elementary forces that contended there, and created life as yet was not. But God’s Spirit brooded over that deep and began to bring light, life,

and order from it. In this ancient condition of our globe, ravaged by storms, overhung by gloom, destitute of all life, I see a picture of the sinner's heart all darkened and convulsed by evil passions ; and that same Spirit Who moved upon Chaos can bring into peace all that is so amiss in the moral world. He is the Giver of life to each soul, as He was to the whole globe. Whence life comes, how it comes, I cannot fully trace ; but God is its Author and Giver.

3. *And God said, Let there be light : and there was light.*

Here is the first and most beautiful of God's works. By it we discern all the rest. All colours, all beauties depend upon it ; it is a living image of His own perfections. Yet natural light is but a figure of that inward light of Truth which illuminates the heart's darkness and reveals Christ's glorious Face, full of radiance. O God, all is light before Thee. I cannot hide any corner of my life or character from Thy sight. Let me so live that I may not be confounded at the Judgment Day, when all my doings will be clearly manifested. That will be a dread light, after the long confusion of this dark world.

4. *And God saw the light, that it was good : and God divided the light from the darkness.* 5. *And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.*

The division of light from darkness in the natural world was God's work. So it is in the world of grace. He illumines one heart, one nation, one age, and lets darkness overwhelm another ; nor can I wholly tell the reasons of His dispensations ; but I know this, that He bids me strive after light and live in the light. This first day, on which light was made, received greater glory under the Gospel, when upon it Jesus rose to life, and again when upon that day the Spirit brought His new light of grace. Let me honour that good day by praise and rest ; it should be to me a token and foretaste of heaven, where all will be light.

6. *And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.*

This is our air or atmosphere which surrounds the globe, and by a constant circulation draws up, holds, and dispenses moisture to the earth. Thus alone our globe becomes habitable for living creatures—thus are tempered the fierce extremes of heat and cold which would otherwise forbid created life. My eyes, indeed, reach upward to the stars and discern not this soft invisible curtain of air which God has disposed between, but I feel its benefits every moment. So may my spirit draw breath and life from God as my bodily frame does from the literal air.

7. *And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.* 8. *And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.*

Augustine compares Scripture to this firmament. He says God has set it to overshadow all our life. It contains refreshing and necessary truths for all. All men may look up and learn from it to live a heavenly life. In it God has set His bright lights or examples and words of grace. There are indeed 'waters above the firmament,' ranks of heavenly beings who need no Scripture, but behold God's Truth directly, are set near to His throne; but we all who are on earth look up with gratitude to His revealed word and discern His mercy and goodness there. This second day is memorable to me by the creation of the firmament or atmosphere. I begin to recognise a gradual progress in God's works, and I learn to await their issue in patience.

9. *And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.* 10. *And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He seas: and God saw that it was good.*

Here is man's dwelling-place emerging above the waters. God began in ages long past to prepare the earth for our abode; it was not yet that beautiful earth which we know now, adorned with varied colours, rich in innumerable creatures. No, all was as yet barren and lifeless, but earth and sea were preparing to receive and cherish created life. When I think of the primitive rocks emerging from the floods, I am reminded of the stormy tide of human affairs and of a true Christian character rising firmly and securely above them. Yet this soil too, O Lord, cannot receive good seed and produce fruit unless of Thy gift.

11. *And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.*

Here is the marvellous gift of life: whence could it come except from God? He alone is the mysterious source of it. Vegetable life began, how I know not, and developed into the beauty, the delicacy, the variety of the plants and herbs which I see around me. I marvel at the effect of their combined colours, much more at those which I examine closely. I see that each plant preserves its own nature, has its own dwelling-place and nourishment, repro-

duces its kind. Words fail me to express the wonders which each flower and each herb can disclose. I remember my Master's words when he said the flowers were more admirable than 'Solomon in all his glory.'

12. *And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.*

13. *And the evening and the morning were the third day.*

Then all these plants which God made in infinite variety and beauty have power to reproduce themselves. He who made them at first gave them the gift of continuance. We too in our brief life

'Scatter seeds with careless hand,
And deem we ne'er shall see them more;
But for a thousand years
Their fruit appears'

in good or bad results. May I be firmly rooted in grace, nourished by heavenly dews, ready to bring forth good fruit in acknowledgment of all the mercies that the Giver of all good has showered upon me. He stores the earth richly with what I should need, so may I lay up in the children's minds some seeds of faith, reverence, and duty, to spring up in their after life.

14. *And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: 15. and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.*

In this stage of Creation the heavenly bodies appear. Occupations and pursuits of all creatures on earth are measured and arranged according to the times marked by the revolution of the heavens. Will not redeemed mankind so order their hours as to find due time and fitting place for intercourse with God? For this end seasons, days, and years were appointed, not only for the affairs of earth.

'Thus nature, saved from disarray,
Is free to wait on grace.'

But a whole flood of thoughts come into my mind when I consider how many devout souls have been stirred to prayer by considering the sun 'coming forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber,' or 'the moon and the stars which God has ordained.' I should like to join my meditations to theirs. I behold in this mighty, marvellous, infinitely bountiful sun a figure of my Saviour's dignity and mercy; in the moon I see figured the light of Holy Scripture which, though not perfectly clear, yet consoles and guides us in our darkness; stars remind me of those noble souls who 'turn many to righteousness' and 'shine as the stars for ever and ever.'

16. *And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: He made the stars also.*

'The Royal Sun begins his state,' and all other light is swallowed up; again night comes and the moon lights up the face of heaven; then, when she withdraws, innumerable stars come out over the sky: their brilliancy is the same as when the world was made, their number uncountable, the source of their light beyond my reach. I am confounded when I try to reckon their size or their distance. The day concealed these marvels from me, but the darkness discloses them. So, O Lord, Thou hast stored in dark hours new sources of light, new comforts of grace which I missed in the gaudy day.

17. *And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.*

I cannot count the stars, but they are known to their Creator; He made and set them on high. So each soul is known to Him, He marks them all—none of their good deeds, their prayers, their victories are lost. I discern some rays from such as God has set in my firmament, within my reach. They are a guide and help to me, but how great will be the splendour of that happy region where all goodness will be seen and known?

18. *And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.* 19. *And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.*

We are children of the light and of the day; let us not fall back into despairing thoughts or ways of evil. The literal sun may cease to shine, the moon be darkened, but God's eternal promises remain. Nothing can obscure them. He has set us, for our short earthly course, amidst this temporal world, where all things pass swiftly, and we with them, but He designs us to adorn His eternal home. When lights of earth are extinguished, I will the more firmly cling to God, Who is the undying Source of light.

20. *And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.*

Here is a new world of life, infinitely varied, far different from the life of plants or of stars, for the waters have begun to swarm with every variety of fish and reptiles, and the air is full of birds. I am amazed when I study either of these two spheres of being. Who has taught, O Lord, to fish their swift graceful movements, their periodical returns to land or depths of ocean, their precautions

against enemies, the way to provide for themselves? Who has shown the birds how to dart through the air, to sing, to build each kind their own nests, to hatch their young, to move from land to land as the seasons change? When wise men survey the mysteries of the world of life, even in these its humbler specimens, they are filled with delight and wonder at the spectacle. Here are the innumerable nations of sea and air, in ordered ranks, in settled habits, unerringly obeying instincts which have sway over millions at once. Such a sight gives me lofty thoughts of creative wisdom.

21. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

Good indeed, and marvellous, nor has man's eye yet scrutinised all its marvels. Till the end of time there will always be fresh subjects for study and for admiration in the living things which God has made in such rich variety. When I observe that some of these creatures are confined to the sea or to the shore, while others rise up and move heavenwards in swift flight, I am reminded of the difference in human beings. Some are wholly of this earth, they have no thoughts beyond; others are uplifted by wings of faith and love, seek their God, live for unselfish ends. May I experience God's grace within, triumphing over my earthly tendencies and raising me in heavenward flight.

22. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. 23. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

God addressed these creatures who possessed conscious life, though not able to recognise their Maker. He promised by this blessing to perpetuate the creatures which He had made, to provide for them, to endow them with so great fertility that they should not be extirpated by all their enemies. In this verse I behold Divine Providence providing and maintaining those astonishing balances and compensations whereby one kind of creature influences another, and all alike contribute towards the general well-being of the world. In that fifth day I see a great stage is passed in the upward movement of all things towards perfection.

24. And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

An attentive mind beholds here God in His wisdom and mercy bestowing wonderful gifts on the animal creation. Some are destined

for man's use; they are his willing, laborious servants, or supply him with food or clothing, or at least wait on his footsteps with dutiful affection. Some again live a wild, independent life; their habits and needs are less known to us. Some are fierce and terrible to man. Still, in all alike, great and infinitely small, as far as my feeble senses can reach, I behold a wealth of wisdom displayed, I see each rank of being depending on another, I see contrivances and adaptations beyond words to express. My feeling is, 'Lord, how manifold are Thy works; in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches.'

25. *And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.*

The world of animals is only known to me by its exterior. I can only guess by imperfect indications what passes within. The animals move around me, depend on me, and I on them; yet I cannot understand their language or their destiny, or God's full purpose in making them. They seem so near, yet far from me. Such thoughts make me more inclined to await patiently the unfolding of God's providences over myself. It is but little I can discern of His marvellous order in nature, and even that perplexes as well as enlightens me. So much the more readily let me turn inward and address myself to the due ordering of my own little world of mind and heart: there too all is good in God's intention and in the view of Redeeming Grace, but I have spoilt what He has made and remade.

26. *And God said, Let Us make man in Our Image, after Our Likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

Now that all things are ready, now that man's dwelling-place is prepared and furnished, God brings him upon the scene at last. Here is a master for the world; one who can interpret its meaning, act as its priest: he is indeed a weak and dependent creature, in need of all the rest, but still having in him something which they have not. God appears to deliberate, to take counsel before He forms this His last and noblest creature, and He forms him after His own Image. God, Who is invisible, has sent man to be His viceroy over the world of sense, and represent to the other creatures something of His own goodness, wisdom, and power. Indeed 'we see not yet all things put under him.' Man has lost his glory, but I know of one Perfect Man Who has undertaken to restore mankind to their due place, and that by humbling Himself to the lowest place and pains.

27. So God created man in His own Image, in the Image of God created He him ; male and female created He them.

In what consists this Image of God? and do I and my brethren retain any trace of it, amidst our follies, corruptions, and miseries? Indeed my soul is free, it can choose or reject as it wills; it has an ineradicable admiration for goodness; it longs for what is eternal and groans under the weight of corruption. Thoughts of compassion, of prayer, of self-sacrifice, are relics of God's Image in me. I am indeed assailed by impulses that drag me down to the level of beasts, but God when He created me set in my nature a spark of heavenly fire. His Spirit has kindled this again when it was almost extinguished. His Son has traced afresh the Divine Pattern which was almost blotted out.

28. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it : and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Man has to subdue the earth—this is his work, his battle. But he has first to bring himself again into subjection to the Divine Law whence he has fallen; thus only will he be able to rule over the world without. God's blessing is given in this verse to married life. He has so ordered that a great part of our life is passed in infancy and childhood, under our parents' control, depending on them, and we in our turn exercise the same function towards the next generation. For great ends did God put dear children in our care, trust their being, their growth, their instruction, to us. They are God's heirs whom He lends to us to cherish. God's purpose for man is not that he should lead a slothful life, but should apply his energy to setting the world in order and preparing a home for himself and his posterity.

29. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. 30. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.

God has filled the world with riches and beauty, and this is for our service. The commencement of life He has wrapt in mystery, has reserved to Himself, but we see its bountiful increase, we see the immortality of the race continued from age to age, though each individual perishes. Dear Lord, hast not Thou for Thy servants

something better than this? Thou art the God of each soul, and it can establish an undying communion with Thee. Thou hast settled man as lord over the visible world, with power to use the creatures for his food or service, but he himself is something different from them, more precious than they; he appeals to Thy eternity, and not in vain.

31. *And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*

Attend to God's works and you will admire them. God himself took pleasure in His fair creation, and we certainly may do the same. Here is a notice of the great universe now complete—it contains a wealth of beauty—it is a subject worthy of delight; we may indeed say with the Psalmist, 'The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.' Human works are roughly adjusted, coarsely finished, but God's works in nature are of an extreme delicacy, an excellence beyond our imitation. There are still in them depths undiscovered which future generations will find out and admire. Just as I see in the new world of grace, in the Passion of Christ, in the gifts of the Spirit, a wealth of marvels, wisely and beautifully wrought, so I feel in considering Creation; both come from one Author and unite to declare His perfections to us.

CHAPTER II

1. The first sabbath. 4. The manner of the creation. 8. The planting of the garden of Eden, 10. and the river thereof. 17. The tree of knowledge only forbidden. 19, 20. The naming of the creatures. 21. The making of woman, and institution of marriage.

THUS *the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.*

Then and thus was the great world set in order and perfected; by a gradual growth to perfection through long periods of time, and at the bidding of a mighty disposing Intelligence, and in tender provident mercy, and as preparing a dwelling for rational creatures, who should in God's Image rule and cultivate His fair world. Thus, O Lord, and no otherwise—and if I cannot in my feeble intelligence trace every detail of the work, yet I am sure that it was well and wisely wrought, I learn to put confidence in Thy power and goodness.

2. *And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.*

Yet our Lord says, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' Yes, though God rested from creating, He never ceased to govern, to guide, to quicken the world He made. Were He to withdraw His hand it would return to nothingness again. When I am told that God 'rested,' does that mean that He created no longer but let the world continue in that path which He had set for it? Shall I understand that the world's birthday was over and the time of common, ordinary life had begun? Am I taught here that the great forces which had been employed to produce the world we know subsided into the beneficent activity of God's daily working? Let me at least draw a homely lesson for myself. Why should I be ashamed of work? My God Himself set His hand to create. He worked at preparing my dwelling-place, and my existence—then afterwards He rested. So may I too work here and rest in eternity.

3. *And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.*

This first Sabbath, the sanctification of the seventh day, its being made a day of rest for mankind, a memorial of creation to all ages, reminds me of another Sabbath when Jesus Christ rested in the grave. He too had done His work and rested from it. He had wrought out our Redemption in His working-day of labour and pain. Then He entered into the unseen world to apply to us the fruits of His work. The Church of Christ, filled with the thoughts of her Lord's triumph, transferred the day of rest and worship from the seventh to the first day of the week. This is a good day, a day on which the weary earth has breathing-time; let me always reverence it and maintain its liberty for my hard-worked brethren. God has given it me that my soul may find leisure to remember His good works in nature and in grace. I myself and all that I enjoy have been made by His power and love; but in the Holy Gospel and the gifts of the Spirit I recognise another and greater work, deserving of more thanks and praise than I can pay.

4. *These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,*

Here begins a new paragraph of the Creation history—we are coming now to the fortunes of man—we view the earth as man's dwelling-place, man's trial scene; other orders of creatures pass

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out of sight. What their trial, their destiny is, we know not; but God has given man a probation, a law of progress. This we are about to trace. Further, we notice in the verse a new name of God. He is called the Lord God, not only an unseen Almighty Power, but Jehovah, the Eternal Ever-living One, Who enters into covenant with His servants, and is the same from age to age—they know that He is true.

5. And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. 6. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

What we call the order of nature, the periodical course of the seasons, year by year, which we are familiar with, had once no existence. It fills our senses and seems to us almost divine, yet God has no need of it, and can alter it or abolish it if He pleases. Let me cling fast to One Who is distinct from and above nature, and will be the same when nature (as we understand it) has passed away. I observe too that man did not appear till the earth had become fit for his dwelling-place. God disposed all things for man, and man for Himself.

7. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

I am then made of dust, of the same material as the lower creatures, on the same plan as they; my body is nourished by earthly food, I am subject to the same accidents that befall the animal world; soon my body will return to the dust again; and yet God has put in me a spark of Divine fire, a breath from on high. In the long series of creatures that had come into being up to this epoch of creation there lacked a ruler for the world, a guiding intelligence. Now God has formed His best work, constituted His viceroy over things of sense. Glory be to God for this twofold nature in which He has made me! May I live according to the higher life, and so subdue my frail body that it may be one day remade by Divine immortalising power, and become a fit tabernacle for the glorified spirit. The wonderful things amidst which He has set me here hint to me of greater marvels to come.

8. And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. 9. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also

in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Here are all beauty, all wonder, all delight. Here was a summary of all that God had wrought so variously in His fair creation, yet one thing was lacking, that was security; all this peace, all this joy, rested on the frail tenure of man's persevering in good. O Lord, I know that when things smile most and are brightest, then danger is near. Fallen man certainly is not fit to be placed amidst joys and satisfactions without any drawback; and even unfallen man, though innocent and pure, was capable of temptation through his senses. In Eden there were fruits fit to sustain natural life, also the fruit of immortality whence man was to derive the gift of eternal life, also the fruit of the tree of knowledge in keeping from which consisted man's probation. God has set us in His Church, which is like Paradise restored, surrounded by fruits of grace, having Jesus Christ Himself in our midst for our Living Bread, but with a condition laid upon us of obeying, of refraining from sin, of submitting to His holy law, if we would keep our felicity. He would have this Paradise brighten at last into life everlasting, where all will be secure for ever.

10. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.

As from this one perfectly clear and beautiful stream, which brought life to the garden, parted the four rivers to water the earth, so should all our human affections flow from the love of God. Him we should love with heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, and then from this supreme love will flow in life-giving succession all duties, all kindnesses, all charities. The river which flowed forth from Eden reminds me of the 'living water,' 'the water of life,' mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, that stream which is represented as flowing through the restored Temple or the Golden City, as proceeding from God's Altar or God's Throne, or as being Christ's special gift. Mankind in this dry dusty world have longed for a draught from it.

11. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.

12. And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. 13. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. 14. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.

I have no certain knowledge of these four rivers. Perhaps two of their names might be those of Indus or of Nile, certainly two

stand for Tigris and Euphrates ; but I cannot identify their course nor trace them, as they now are, to one source. I see figured herein the life-giving streams of Christian truth which the Apostles and Missionaries of the Gospel brought into heathen lands from their one source in Christ crucified and risen. How widely they flowed forth, and still flow ! The four Gospels are so many channels of this truth to refresh hearts in every age.

15. *And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.*

God said to man, 'Behold your dwelling ; I have abundantly provided it with all things needful and beautiful. Behold your occupation ; it will be happy, peaceful, varied ; it will furnish you with infinite material for heavenly reflections ; it will enable you to concur with my Providence in the operations of nature ; it will teach you that humanity is itself 'God's husbandry.' And not only dress the garden but keep it ; watch against foes ; watch against the weakness of your own will ; remember to lift up your heart for help to Me, Who am ever near. All this beauty, all this peace, is held by you on terms of watching, of working, of praying.' O Lord, if mankind in their first created innocence needed a daily task, a careful walk, how much more do I who have so often fallen ? Into what depths of ruin may not an idle, careless temper plunge me ! The productions of nature can be improved by man's care. So too in my own heart, that garden or plantation of God, is much that needs to be tended, trained, raised to higher growths.

16. *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat.*

Life is to be maintained by taking food ; and God has annexed pleasure to this act, made our nourishment agreeable to us. Our bodies fail and perish unless sustained from without ; but our inward life, that which is in the Divine Image, equally needs to be supported. What will best strengthen and refresh the immortal spirit ? Are there not poisons which would destroy it, harmful food that weakens instead of strengthening its powers ? O Thou Whose mercy has supplied me with earthly food, grant that I may joyfully receive, inwardly digest, live in the strength of Heavenly Bread. Thus by Thy mercy I shall grow up into fitness for a blessed immortality.

17. *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it : for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

Was not this restraint a warning given to our first parents to call them from earthly to heavenly life ? Did it not teach them that their true happiness lay not in mere enjoyment but in obedience

to a Divine Command? This warning did not only restrain their bodily appetite but also that desire to know all that can be known which is so fatal to purity and simplicity of heart. The tree of knowledge afforded a probation to man, which if he had borne rightly he would after a while have been confirmed for ever in good, and raised from an earthly to a heavenly paradise. Death was to be the penalty of transgression. The soul once become unfaithful would lose its hold on the body, and then dissolution would follow. The tree of life with its heavenly remedy would be no longer in man's reach. I too have heard this grave warning that sin brings death; would that I had heeded it more.

18. *And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*

What, none such in earth or air—not angels, nor stars, nor beasts made for sport or service, none of the varied and wonderful creatures among whom man was set? No, none could be to him the help, the companion he needed. God framed man so as to need another heart to lean on; one destined for the same end, having the same duties and hopes, able to unite in prayer and praise with him. Therefore God provided him with this companion, and fixed his heart's desire upon her. But if it is not good for man always to be alone, neither is it good for him never to be alone. To be alone with God and our own soul is a wholesome experience; but we must soon return to daily duties, daily cares, to the task of giving solace and help to our brethren. Thus knit in heart and service with those whom God has given us, and yet choosing times to be alone and think of our last end, we shall pass on safely through this world to a better.

19. *And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.*

This spectacle awoke in Adam's mind a sense of wonder at the marvels of the brute creation, a sense of God's glory and wisdom displayed in their structure and properties, a sense, too, of his own loneliness, set here among all these varieties of being, yet with no mate. He surveyed his dominion, yet desired something more. Lord, Who hast put in man's heart this unsatisfied longing which even the awakening of human love could not wholly meet, do Thou in Thine own time complete and fill it with Thine own Self. Nothing on earth can be to us all that we want.

20. *And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.*

So man had power of speech, and a sense of the fitness of things, and of the kind of name each animal ought to have—either its colour, or movement, or cry, or some other peculiarity about it, fixed a name upon it, so that man was able henceforth to indicate or summon it by such or such a sound. How wonderful is this gift of speech, whereby we commune with God and with our brethren, and indicate our will to the animals. It has grown up from simple beginnings into fully ordered and perfected language. O what an instrument to govern, to enlighten, to comfort, or, alas, to do mischief!

21. *And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.*

In this deep mysterious sleep which came on Adam after he had surveyed the world and found no fit companion for himself, and during which God formed his bride out of his own side, I discern a figure of Christ Jesus sleeping the sleep of death upon the Cross, and the spear opening His holy side, so that out of it streams of grace might flow to us, and the life of the Catholic Church begin. S. Paul says (Eph. v. 32) that all this history concerns Christ and the Church. He is our Second Adam, His Church our Mother. He gave Himself to die that our souls might be new-born through grace.

22. *And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man.*

Thus women's highest beauty, their choicest grace, was built up by God. He is their Maker and Perfecter. Let them remember that His hands gave them whatever glory they have. He has willed that all mankind, male and female, should spring from one root—the man whom He had made in His own Image. Adam is the common father of all, and the world to come will (our Lord teaches us, S. Mark xii. 25) unite again in one celestial life what has been separated in sexual differences here. Meanwhile we see how the woman completes the man, supplies his defects, leads him to higher thoughts, teaches him patience and tenderness,—to her is committed the birth, the care, the training of each generation.

23. *And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*

Here is another self more closely knit to man than any other creature could be—here is a partner of his life, a sharer in his cares and

joys ; yet this close and intimate union, life-long, most absorbing, most tender as it is, represents to us another and higher tie—‘we are members of Christ’s Body, of His flesh, and of His bones.’ He is pleased to take to Himself the believer’s soul in a close and tender relation of love and trust ; sacramental grace unites us to Him ; all our spiritual life, all that is good in us, flows from the heavenly union. We are not always conscious of the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom, even when we are truly His and He ours ; yet sometimes

‘Haply, as at Eucharist we knelt,
Something that thrilled us more than touch or speech,
Has made His presence felt.’

24. *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife : and they shall be one flesh.*

This word is repeated at each marriage. The two hearts whom God joins together leave their former life to enter on a new one. They obtain grace to serve God together, to bear with each other’s infirmities, help each other along the road of life, bring up dear children for God’s service. Yes ; it is He who brings bridegroom and bride to each other, blesses their union, associates them in an eternal hope. Yet men’s sin and selfishness will often defile this Divine plan and turn into lifelong misery what He meant for our sanctification. If I were to live alone, I should miss much help in serving God ; yet if it be His will that a solitary life is appointed me, I will remember that many devout souls have been united to no answering soul on earth but to their Heavenly Spouse alone, and have found all they needed in Him.

25. *And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*

Thus men were meant to live an angelic life, where no evil thoughts came in. The life of fallen creatures seeks for shadow, cannot bear the full light of day, but in our first innocence there was no need to be ashamed. It is hard for me, who bear about me a fallen nature, even to imagine a sinless condition ; but I see that that flesh which Christ took of His Virgin Mother is perfectly holy and pure, and that He desires to bless and consecrate even my frail body, so as at last to bring it forth from the grave purified after His likeness. Thus ends the history of our first created innocence ; if man had remained in it, he would have been prepared for a blessed immortality, led onward as God’s child to higher things, without passing through the evils which we endure. Man, in his first estate of childlike innocence, had all that he needed, but on the condition of watching. May I, who have been restored to God’s favour through Christ Jesus, be on my guard lest I lose all irremediably.

CHAPTER III

1. The serpent deceiveth Eve. 6. Man's shameful fall. 9. God arraigneth them. 14. The serpent is cursed. 15. The promised seed. 16. The punishment of mankind. 21. Their first clothing. 22. Their casting out of paradise.

NOW *the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*

Here the history of our troubles begins. It would seem that the actual serpent was but the instrument of an unseen mighty power of evil who employed him to deceive Eve, and still continues to deceive us by other means. If danger is so near, I must beware lest poison lurk in simple things, in actions that seem easy and natural. Here in the beautiful garden where all was bright, all things subject to man, yet Satan entered and brought ruin. It is just when all things smile on me that I need be on my guard. Christ the Lord was tempted in the wilderness and overcame; if it is God's will that life's garden should become for me a lonely wilderness as the years go on, yet I may gain thereby a strength against temptation which I lacked in prosperous days. In this temptation the evil one began by infusing discontent. 'Yea, hath God said?'—as if asking 'why should you be so poorly off? why are you thus hedged in and restrained? what are all your glories and capacities worth if you are forbidden this or that?' Lord, I recognise that voice. I have heard it often. I know its great power, its hateful persuasiveness. Let me counteract it by a humble and thankful temper. God has given me so much that I may freely enjoy, let me be grateful for that and content with it. I submit cheerfully to the wise restraints He has provided.

2. *And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden.* 3. *But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.*

It is rash to enter into discussion with any temptation. Far better to stir up our faith and recall what God has mercifully said, and that our happiness lies in obedience. If we are allowed to taste freely of many innocent pleasures which God has set round our path, yet let it be with a feeling that we are servants set over His tasks, or travellers journeying rapidly towards His Presence; if

we sit down too long or too carelessly beneath the trees of permitted fruit, may not the Tempter insensibly lead us on to partake of what is unlawful? True love for God, and a sincere faith that He is near, are weapons able to confound Satan.

4. *And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.*

Is God true or not? Here is His assurance that sin brings death plainly contradicted by the Tempter. Eve, when in Paradise, first doubted whether God was true, and then was persuaded that He was not. We who have had more experience since her day, and have learnt the ruin that sin causes, and have had God manifest in the flesh speaking and telling us just the same, yet still inquire doubtingly and wonder whether sin will bring us death. Let me, O Lord, form a just idea of Thee, experience devout communion with Thee, learn to know Thy voice well, so that I may stand up for Thy truth against a world in arms, and declare that what Thou sayest will certainly be done. As regards the effect of sin, as regards Christ's Presence in the Holy Sacrament, as regards prayer being answered, I know what God has said, and I am firmly convinced that He is right, doubt or contradict who will.

5. *For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*

This is the way that temptation has run ever since. The Evil One bids us seek for freedom, emancipate ourselves from the restraints of childhood, not be afraid of doing what others do. He exaggerates the burdens of our present condition, and promises interesting experiences, sweet and pleasant opportunities. Eve was beguiled by the serpent's craft, which was new to her, but we have had warnings enough of the misery to which trying and tasting evil leads. It is a poor exchange to get knowledge and lose duty, love, and peace. I should desire to be like God—yes, but like God in His humiliation; like God in the Person of the Holy Jesus, pure, compassionate, diligent, patient—that is a Divine Pattern suited to my fallen condition.

6. *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

This first sin pleased the appetite, delighted the sight, gratified pride. Alas, so it does now! I have senses that cry out to be satisfied,

I like to look and judge for myself, I love to look down on others from the elevation of a wider experience. Indeed, in my baptism I promised to 'fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil'; nor did my Master set me any other example when He overcame the three temptations in the wilderness. But I feel my own appalling weakness in the presence of evil; indeed, I have so often fallen, that I scarcely have strength to resist now. Yet courage, frail soul! did not Christ shed His Blood, send His Spirit, provide sacramental food, inspire countless weak and frail mortals with a noble purity, a bravery that trampled down strong allurements and fierce threats? What would true Christians have said of thee who art so easily led astray?

7. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

After sin comes shame: the conscience wakes, the soul realises its loss and misses its former peace. Our first parents felt that they had lost an invisible spiritual garment, the purity which had clothed them formerly; they felt that they were not the same, now that God's grace was gone. Therefore their whole desire was to provide a covering for their nakedness. This they hastened to do, and yet found themselves still ill at ease—they had but hidden what gave them shame, but no thought was theirs as yet of confessing their fault or making their peace with God. O my God, I too know well the rebellion of the body against the soul. I carry about with me a body of death; but I know that Thou didst take flesh like mine, in order to sanctify and purify my body and make it fit to rise one day in perfect innocence.

8. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

Then God had been wont in the happy garden to manifest His Presence to sight and hearing. He condescended to have intercourse with man; and this had been man's dearest delight while he was innocent; he rejoiced to meet his Maker; he welcomed the light or the sound which told of God's approach. How different now! He could not bear to meet God's eye; he sought vainly to put a barrier between himself and the All-seeing. This verse exactly represents the feeling with which a guilty conscience regards religious truth. 'It is unbearable, intolerable,' says the evil heart, 'that God should see me; that He should be my Judge, my Redeemer. His Holy Sacrament, His Word, the hour of prayer, such things are now hateful to me. I would fain put them right away and be rid of them once for all.'

9. *And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?*

This is a word in mercy. God condescends to pursue us, to awaken us, not to leave us to ourselves. In our darkness He followed us; when we were in a far country His mercy awoke in us deep dissatisfaction and unrest. I desire exceedingly that if I am so unhappy as to fall into deadly sin God's mercy would not leave me there. Far better to be asked, 'Where art thou?' to be confounded, to be overtaken, to be brought to shame, than to be left to the deadly slumber of indifference. Indeed I may ask myself, 'Where am I? into what condition has my folly plunged me?'

10. *And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.*

Adam came forth and stood trembling; but he had not yet any penitence, only fear of God's wrath. In his answer one may note what a change had come on him; he says that he could not bear God's voice or his own nakedness, and so that he was obliged to hide; yet up to this time that voice had been a sound of comfort and joy, that nakedness a robe of innocence; now all has changed without, because of change in the inward life. Let us never seek to conceal ourselves from God or from our own shame, but rather avow plainly our unworthiness, seeing ourselves as He sees us, and yet seeking for mercy. We fear Him, and yet have cause to trust His Love.

11. *And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?*

We stand before our Judge, and He desires to awaken our conscience, to lead us to repentance. He points out to us the real cause of our wretchedness. I learn here that evil desire is the punishment of sin as well as the cause of it. My own folly in bygone days is the cause that I am so easily tempted, so constantly led astray now. I am what my own sins have made me. Yet, dear Lord, Thy victorious grace has a remedy even for such as I am. Thou pointest to a heavenly food which can counteract the forbidden fruit and work entire restoration. My foulness can all be washed away in the stream of Thy mercy, and I myself rendered fit to stand in Thy Presence and praise Thee for ever.

12. *And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.*

So with sin there came on the desire to excuse ourselves and throw the blame on another. What had become of our first parents' mutual love? What of Adam's protecting care for her who was 'flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone'? Sin had altered all this and turned

it to suspicion and mutual accusation. Let me rather discern my own guilt and confess it. It was not circumstance, nor friends, nor persuasions, but my own folly, O Lord, that led me away from Thee. I wilfully put forth my hand and plucked the fruit, which has caused me many bitter regrets since.

13. *And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.*

Oh for prudence not to be beguiled ! Oh for steadfast resolution not to touch and taste ! It avails not to throw the blame on the Tempter when we are ourselves guilty. I thought sin was a trifle, and that I might well serve both God and my own passions. I thought that innocence was too simple and too childish. I thought that sin was glorious. Indeed I was thoroughly deceived in all this—no doubt about that ; but, O my soul, hadst thou not many warnings : the voice of conscience, the authority of the good, the restraints of grace ?

14. *And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field ; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life :*

The words of doom refer literally to the serpent, but the reality of them to the Tempter who had employed the serpent for his instrument. They express the abhorrence which man would feel for the spirit of evil, the vileness and hatefulness of the means which he would employ to harm us, the futility of his efforts against God's elect. This verse tells in figurative speech of the degradation of that glorious spirit who was once like God, but chose evil for his portion instead of good. To him was said—

‘Think not thy shape the same,
Nor undiminished brightness to be known,
As when thou stoodst in heaven upright and pure.’

15. *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

The woman's Seed should engage in conflict with the serpent, a conflict hard and grievous, yet in which the former would overcome. Such is the first dim promise of the Redeemer, like a ray to lighten the darkness of man's downfall. Mary's Son should repair the folly that sin has wrought. Indeed I see that my Lord came to fight, to bruise, to be bruised. His was no easy victory, no mere show of strife. His members too must resolve to be bold if they would have God ‘bruise Satan beneath their feet.’ The victory is wholly of our God, but we must bring the arms of constant patience, of unswerving trust, in Him who bled for us.

16. *Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.*

Here is a doom of sorrow, pain, and subjection. Even sacred motherhood, the great glory of woman, should come with danger and anguish; even the holy union of matrimony should be a bondage to the soul, a hindrance to the Divine life. Yet all this sentence was given in mercy. God would have woman work out her salvation by submission, by duty, by care for husband and children, by waiting on the needy and infirm. Instead of the Tempter's bait of independence and fancied glory God offers the remedy of obedience, the bitter draught of pain. Glory be to God, Who was pleased to raise up our race again from its fall, and in due time to come to us Himself by the instrumentality of a human Mother.

17. *And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;*

God sent the curse on the earth, not on man; for us, indeed, there was ordained exile, labour, and pain; but all this has a remedial aspect—it is God's method of restoring us to fitness for Paradise again. This verse contains the sentence of labour. Woe to those who try to withdraw themselves from it: they will only run in danger of many evils and miseries—'Thou shalt eat in travail,' such is God's sentence. What place then has self-indulgent idleness in this world of work? Lord, give me grace to remember this sentence of Thine, and to abhor idleness, which will ruin me in body or else in soul. If I am ever tempted to lead a lazy, selfish life, let me call to mind that Thy dear Son took on Him a humble place, a laborious life.

18. *Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;*

In cultivating the ground I see how easily weeds and thorns grow, how much labour and care it needs to produce what is useful to man; and herein I see a figure of my mind wherein all good dispositions are planted with difficulty, and need constant watching over, while evil thoughts and follies grow with rank luxuriance. God has given me a certain space of earth to cultivate, a certain sphere of work, duties towards myself, my friends, those round me. He would have me turn this little plot into a garden, where peace and truth may grow; yet without His constant grace how shall any good thing flourish?

19. *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*

‘Dust to dust.’ How often I have heard those words; let their salutary sound never be effaced from my memory. Here is the end of the longest and the grandest life. Grant me, Lord, a sober, diligent, and patient mind, abhorring self-indulgent dreams, and ‘serving Thee duly in my vocation with thanksgiving.’ Thus I shall tread the downward road with some fear and yet more hope. The reality of death is plain to me, its aspect grave and terrible, but I know that my Lord does not forget His servants. They live with Him though they have passed away from sight and sense.

20. *And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.*

Adam then knew that his race would continue to live, though under the sentence of mortality; he regarded his wife as the mother of generations to come. Did he have a vision of that Holy Mother, to spring in due time from his line, who should conceive and bear in her virgin womb the world’s salvation? She indeed was to regain by her faith and obedience the blessings of which Eve had been deprived. This only we can say, that this verse expresses hope. Even in the midst of trouble and desolation a great hope filled Adam’s breast. God’s judgments had become to him tokens of mercy, means of recovery.

21. *Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*

Here again is forgiving mercy, concealing our shame. Man had become subject to mortality, the heir of sorrow, liable to suffer from the weather and from disease; therefore God provides him with clothing as a remedy for his weakness, a covering for his infirmity. Ah, dear Lord, how much vanity, how much luxury has crept into our dress! how we exalt ourselves above our brethren by splendour or delicacy in apparel! and yet death will soon strip off these disguises and make us all alike—a little dust will be our covering then.

22. *And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of Us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:*

Here is the consequence of sin. The Tempter promised we should be as God, and indeed our knowledge is increased thereby; we

have gained new experiences, but at how great a cost? We have lost that better likeness of God which consisted in truth and peace. God seems in this verse to ridicule our fancied glory and show us that we have lost the substance and gained only the deceiving shadow. Divine Wisdom thus mocks at us, shows us what we really are, exposes the vain pretensions which we make to intellectual superiority. Not thus, indeed, not thus, can we win heaven and partake of immortality. Now that the Tree of life is restored to me on Christ's Cross, I would sit humbly at its feet and rest under its branches rather than follow the Tempter into glowing fields of fancied independence. The Second Adam came to assume our fallen condition that He might lead us gently home again by the way of sorrows.

23. *Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.*

Here is Adam fallen from his high estate. He has lost his crown of glory, his happiness, his peace. Now he is no longer fit to live in the beautiful garden; he must go forth into the workaday world and suffer his punishment in patience. In him we may see ourselves: we too have lost Paradise, but retain confused remembrances of good, thoughts which lead us upward, a standard of right which we fitfully strive to regain. We still retain God's Image and cannot be as the beasts, and yet there lies on us a heavy doom of labour and sorrow, with death to end the prospect. But in Adam the remembrance of glory was most vivid, and the sense of loss greatest. God's mercy did not indeed forsake him. God led him through long years of penitence to a peaceful end. God inspired him with hopes of a deliverer to come. God turned his punishment into a remedy for his sin.

24. *So he drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword, which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*

These are the same winged forms that appear in Scripture as watching over the ark of the covenant, as bearing up or surrounding God's throne. This fiery whirling sword is the constant figure of God's wrath. We see here the approach to God's Presence strictly interdicted to man. How shall it be restored again? Who will open the way into Paradise or bring man near to the life-giving fruit? Ah! we know Who came to make peace between God and man, to open a way into the holiest place. We know Who promised to believers the tree of life and the water of life. I read in the account of Christ's Passion that He, when dying, took charge of a dying person and promised to introduce him into Paradise that day. I rejoice in my Lord's victory, and I lay hold on His merciful Hand that He may conduct me home. I do not fear the fiery sword if my Lord is with me.

CHAPTER IV

1. The birth, trade, and religion of Cain and Abel. 8. The murder of Abel. 11. The curse of Cain. 17. Enoch the first city. 19. Lamech and his two wives. 25. The birth of Seth, 26. and Enos.

AND Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.

Eve, in her exile and penitence, rejoiced over her first-born son. 'Here,' she said, 'is a gift of God, a sign of His continuing mercy to me. This consoles me for my mortality; I shall live on in my child. This is a work of God's own power, God's own wisdom; He has so wonderfully framed it.' Did her thoughts run on to that Holy Infant one day to be born who should regain for us what Eve lost? Alas for her hopes, Cain disappointed his mother, he brought her misery and loss; but yet she was right in feeling joy and hope at her son's birth—it seemed to her a pledge of God's forgiving mercy.

2. *And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.*

The name of Abel means 'vanity.' It seems to express the disappointment of his parents at man's frailty and nothingness, compared with the immortality which they had lost. Cain and Abel both grew up to work—idleness was not yet known in the world. God grant that I may live diligently during my short tenancy of life, and leave behind me the remembrance of some work done for my Master. What if the tending and rearing flocks, the breaking up the ungrateful soil, was hard and disappointing work, yet in obeying God's command to labour man found peace.

3. *And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering.*

Here we find God honoured by sacrifices. Sacrifice expressed man's dependence upon God, man's need of Divine mercy, man's gratitude to the Giver of all good. It was no chance instinct, but implanted from above, which taught us to return in sacrifice to the Giver the choicest of His gifts. Yet in Abel's sacrifice of the slain animals of his flock we may discern something further. Here is

an acknowledgment of sin, here is an effort after the restoration of heavenly communion. By such sacrifices men expressed their longing to expiate sin, to kill what was evil in themselves, to give up their life and all they had to be wholly consecrated to their heavenly Father. All these thoughts about sacrifice are summed up and applied in the unbloody offering which the Church of Christ makes in remembrance of the slain Lamb of God.

5. *But unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.*

It was not so much the gifts as the giver that God regarded. In Abel's offering there was faith, devotion, gratitude. In Cain's something was lacking; he paid the outward sacrifice alone, but the inward offering of a loving and contrite heart was not there. It is not said by what outward sign God showed His acceptance of Abel's gifts. Perhaps by fire sent from heaven upon them; but the same difference exists now, though no sign appears. Many priests, many communicants, offer the sacrifice of praise at God's altar, and yet are not accepted.

6. *And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? 7. If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.*

God pleaded with Cain, gave him many warnings against his jealous temper. God reminded him of past mercies, bade him rejoice in present blessings, instead of brooding over the one annoyance. 'If thou doest well, thou shalt have joy in thy heart and favour with Me. Do not doubt it; but beware of the crouching wild beast of jealousy; it approaches thy door and tries to seize on thee—up and chain it while you can.' God spoke to him in some unmistakable way. The voice warned him of approaching danger, stirred him up to overcome his fault; yet in vain. O God, how often hast Thou pleaded in my heart, bidden me submit my will to Thine, warned me of my own weakness! Let me take to heart, before it is too late, Thy grave and tender warnings. Alas! when once sin has established a hold on the heart, how hard it is to shake it off.

8. *And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.*

Then God stood aside and let the first murder be wrought. The innocent brother was slain by the wicked, who lived long and wrought mighty deeds, while Abel's life and work were prematurely ended. Here begin the mysteries of God's Providence,

why it is He should often interpose to warn us, yet let us at last work out our own choice ; why it is He should subject the innocent to the guilty ; why He should let pure and hopeful lives be early extinguished, while wickedness lives on and triumphs. All these questions are beyond my power to answer ; yet I know that death does not end all. Those who have committed themselves to God will not be deceived. Abel was put to death on account of his devotion and the favour shown to him by God. Thus he stands at the head of the noble army of martyrs who have by their blood overcome the world and converted the unbelieving. They wrought more by their death than their life.

9. *And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper?*

'Yes, indeed, thou art responsible for thy brother. If thou hast harmed him by violence, or by deceit ; if thou hast suffered him to want or be in misery ; still more, if thou hast led him into evil by thine example or persuasion. In all these cases thou art his keeper, and hast betrayed thy trust.' It is impossible for me to disengage myself from responsibility for others—in vain I answer that such an one is not my concern. A voice I cannot stifle assures me that I have a share in all the evil that I have not striven to prevent. O terrible voice of most just judgment, which warns me that there are some who curse the day they knew me, who have to thank me for nothing but harm, who will preserve to all eternity the trace of the evil I did them ! Against such a voice I can but fly to the Blood of another Sufferer which has infinite power to blot out the past.

10. *And He said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground.*

O Judge of mankind, appease the voice which cries so loud ; make me acknowledge with a contrite heart the harm I have done to others. It is true, I know their souls speak against me. I know that Thy justice has a heavy and bitter record of my treatment of them. Yet I do not lose hope. I am confident that Divine mercy is able to do away with the stain, to hush the cry, to make the barren ground bring forth afresh good and hopeful thoughts. Abel, though he is dead, yet speaks ; he tells us of faith, of patience, of purity ; he tells us it is better to die in innocence than live on in vileness.

11. *And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand.*

All things would be linked against the murderer ; all things would bring him a curse instead of a blessing. Adam and Eve, when

they sinned and lost Paradise, had no curse pronounced on them, but only on their tempter and on the ground. They had a life of penitence to lead, and hopes of a coming Redeemer to cherish; but Cain missed all this salutary discipline. Remember, earth will one day reveal the innocent blood; it may hide that blood for a while, but will at last let its cry be heard before God and angels. Those who have ruined, despised, oppressed their brethren may be sure that God remembers.

12. *When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.*

Yet Cain's family became mighty and rich, built cities, invented arts, lorded it over the earth; was then this menace all in vain? Do not think so. It has a deeper meaning than appears in the letter. Cain lost God's Presence and experienced no more communications from Him. Cain devoted himself to this world, as if there was no other; he set his hopes wholly on this fleeting scene, despising eternity. What is earth in faith's view but the preparation, the threshold, the antechamber of a more lasting Home? Of itself it is but vanity, has no true satisfaction; a life spent for the earth only is thrown away.

13. *And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear.*

Before committing sin, it seems a trifle, a thing of no importance. After we have done the evil, it appears so great as to be unpardonable. That is the way with our Tempter—he would have us pass from despising sin to despairing of pardon. Teach me, Lord, after all downfalls to remember the power of Thy precious Blood, the might of Thy grace. No iniquity is too foul, too deep, too heavy for Thy mercy. Whatever Thou sendest by way of punishment may I receive with a humble but hopeful heart, and join it to Thy Cross in patience.

14. *Behold, Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from Thy face shall I be hid: and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.*

Crime bears often a vengeance in itself, even though no thunderbolt fall on the guilty one. The loss of God's Presence, the loss of peace, the fear of judgment, the sense of shame and of ruin wrought, are the very constituents of hell. Cain felt no contrition, but he greatly feared punishment. May I, O Lord, in Thy dear mercy learn to take all punishment patiently, so long as I do not lose a hope of forgiveness. If Thy face is still shining on me, I can bear all else that comes.

15. *And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.*

If the Lord set a sign on Cain to protect him, and this was so efficacious that his life was safe wherever he went, much more will His grace protect the innocent who trust in Him alone. Cain had what he desired, protection from vengeance. All his punishment was from within; there he felt sharper pain than weapons of avenging justice could inflict. I would wipe out by repentance the dread sign or mark of other souls ruined, if it has ever been on my brow. Christ's Blood, which was shed for me, is able to efface it utterly.

16. *And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.*

Cain left Adam and his family (no doubt already multiplying) among whom the worship of the True God, the tradition of Paradise, the hope of a Mediator, were preserved for a while. He left all this and began an irreligious life, devoted only to success in this world. Soon among his descendants all such thoughts as those were counted as dreams. Such is Cain's race; they have left God and fixed all their thoughts and hopes on this transitory, deceiving world.

17. *And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.*

Here is this world's city raised; it soon attached to it those seeking for riches, or for slaves, or for glory; it rose in opposition to the society of believers. In Cain's city there was wealth and display but no inward peace, no light of truth, no care for the poor. Let us be faithful citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, keep its laws, serve its King, promote its welfare; thus our dwelling will be safe, our heart in God's keeping. This world's city will all be swept away soon—woe to them who have all their hopes centred on it.

18. *And unto Enoch was born Irad: and Irad begat Methusael: and Methusael begat Lamech.*

The names of these descendants of Cain, who were the first inhabitants of this world's city, founded its maxims, and began to

spread its corruptions, nearly resemble the names of Seth's descendants in the next chapter, who carried on the tradition of worship and the knowledge of God ; yet there was a difference in their character, in their hopes and aims. The former had forgotten the memories of innocence, the hopes of a Redeemer, the warnings and promises which God had given to man.

19. *And Lamech took unto him two wives : the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.*

Lamech began polygamy, which was afterwards practised by the Patriarchs, and has been the custom in many ages and nations. Nor was it without benefit in peopling the world and protecting helpless women in rough days. Yet it was treason to the true idea of marriage. God's law of wedded love was heart for heart, true and entire devotion on both sides, and this cannot be if a plurality of wives is allowed—to say nothing of the jealousy, the strife, the ruin of home life which such a relation has in practice introduced. O Lord, whether I am wedded or single, keep my heart faithful to Thee alone, Thee above all. Let it love, honour, and obey Thee first, Thee most, and then my earthly affections will fall into their right place.

20. *And Adah bare Jabal : he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle.*

Farm life has its advantages and its dangers. How many faithful souls like David on Jesse's farm, or the shepherds in those same fields a thousand years later, have discerned patterns in it of God's watchful care in feeding, tending, guarding, themselves. 'Lord, Thou hast been my Shepherd,' was the burden of their song ; they heard heavenly voices at night, read God's message in stars. And yet in others this same life has fostered brutal ignorance, neglect of all religious duties, a character enslaved to self.

21. *And his brother's name was Jubal : he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.*

Music when invented became the solace of sorrow, the employment of vacant hours, a means to

'chase
Anguish and doubt and fear and sorrow and pain
From mortal or immortal minds.'

Nay more, it lifted up God's praises, spoke of His perfections, figured what the Blessed do in heaven. God herein provided us with a wonderful language, beyond language, one that has more power to influence for good or evil than spoken sounds have.

22. *And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron : and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.*

Consider with what far-reaching purpose God stored the earth with metals. His Hand framed them through the convulsions, floods, and fires of past ages. His wisdom laid them up within the soil for man in due time to discover and use. They serve to awaken man's powers, to put within his reach all manner of grand designs and wonderful achievements. How great is Thy wisdom, O Lord, in preparing and opening to us, as we need them, these bright and hard metals by the use of which we perform our work or adorn our life.

23. *And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice ; Ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech : For I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. 24. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.*

Then iron had been turned to uses of war as well as of peace. Lamech rejoiced in his new instrument of destruction ; he exulted in being terrible to his enemies. God's vengeance upon Cain's slayer was to be sevenfold, but Lamech felt himself greater than God, and he would punish seventy-fold any one who injured him. Here we note a warning against the lust for vengeance which is so natural to us.

25. *And Adam knew his wife again ; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth : For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.*

Eve was consoled for Abel's death by Seth's birth. In Seth she recognised a type of the promised Deliverer, one from whom that Deliverer should descend. Abel, by dying, had taught of Christ's death ; Seth by his paternity of the faithful seed represented Christ's spiritual fatherhood of innumerable ransomed souls. Eve thought of Paradise and its lost joys, and yet she felt in her motherhood joy that men were born into the world to fill it and to bring on the promised long-expected good.

26. *And to Seth, to him also there was born a son ; and he called his name Enos ; then began men to call upon the Name of the Lord.*

Here is the God of our salvation made known, the covenant name used wherein God's eternity, God's unchangeableness are hinted at. Here is worship begun and a company of worshippers formed.

O God, Thou didst not desert Thy creatures, but didst leave them in this unsettled world the anchor of Divine Truth, of sacred worship, of heavenly promises; to this true hearts clung, though all began to grow dark around them.

CHAPTER V

1. The genealogy, age, and death of the patriarchs from Adam unto Noah. 24. The godliness and translation of Enoch.

THIS is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him; 2. Male and female created He them: and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.

Here begins the history of the holy seed, of that family in the earth in whom alone remained something of true faith and the fear of God, that family from which Abraham was to be born, that family from whom Christ should one day spring. When God made man, He made him in His own Image, with immortal hopes, with a capacity for heaven. Man resembles the other creatures in his body, but in mind he reflects his Maker. He received a blessing which still abides, a nature wonderfully made up of glory and frailty, somewhat to lift him up towards God, something to bow him down earthwards. Thus he was set midway between earth and heaven, having indeed to learn about himself and his surroundings, having to frame and order the world's history, but with a haunting remembrance that this world is not his abiding home.

3. And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth: 4. And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters:

Alas! Adam's children reproduced their father's fallen nature. He had had and wasted treasures of grace. He had corrupted the root from which life was to spring, the vessel in which the soul of man was to be shrined. As the race of man spread, so evil spread with them. What is called original sin, the natural frailty of man, his inclination to evil, his sense of corruption, that something in us which baffles the wisdom of philosophers, the hopes of philanthropists, all this is indeed a mystery to my reason but a plain

enough fact to my experience. Why or how it is, I scarcely know ; but I find it to be so around me and within. I see that I have inherited a doom of sorrow, an inclination to evil. I need Christ's Divine cleansing grace to renew my nature.

5. *And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years : and he died.*

Adam's long life made him to many generations a witness of the Creation history, of man's fall, of the hope of a Redeemer. He and those who listened to him served to restrain evil for a while, to inculcate faith in God. Their words were like those of the Evangelist, 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.' For this purpose they remained alive so long. Adam had heard the sentence, 'Thou shalt surely die,' but he waited long centuries for its fulfilment ; then he passed away in penitence and hope, trusting that Divine mercy would create a fairer and securer Paradise than that which he fondly remembered.

6. *And Seth lived an hundred and five years, and begat Enos :* 7. *And Seth lived after he begat Enos eight hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters :* 8. *And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years : and he died.* 9. *And Enos lived ninety years, and begat Cainan :* 10. *And Enos lived after he begat Cainan eight hundred and fifteen years, and begat sons and daughters :* 11. *And all the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years : and he died.* 12. *And Cainan lived seventy years, and begat Mahalaleel :* 13. *And Cainan lived after he begat Mahalaleel eight hundred and forty years, and begat sons and daughters :* 14. *And all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years : and he died.* 15. *And Mahalaleel lived sixty and five years, and begat Jared :* 16. *And Mahalaleel lived after he begat Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters :* 17. *And all the days of Mahalaleel were eight hundred ninety and five years : and he died.* 18. *And Jared lived an hundred sixty and two years, and he begat Enoch :* 19. *And Jared lived after he begat Enoch eight hundred years, and begat sons and daughters :* 20. *And all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty and two years : and he died.*

Of these long lives we know nought but this, they ended at last ; these lives were far beyond the length that we can hope to reach, but they all conclude as ours do. It is certainly a great mercy of God to have abridged man's days ; if we were sure of living for

eight hundred or nine hundred years, into what licence we should fall, how we should forget our Maker and our Home! Glory be to God for having put our frailty before our eyes, given us reminders of death in a decaying body, in the daily sight of premature ends round us! Glory to God that He has abridged the length of our trial-scene, and made our journey homewards so much the shorter and safer! This long list of ancient patriarchs is a memorial of the men who preserved something of the tradition of Adam's faith, and formed the line whence Christ should spring—all else of them but their names and years has perished.

21. And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah: 22. And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: 23. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: 24. And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

Enoch 'walked with God.' In a world where evil was spreading and increasing, he retained a living faith in God's Providence, a careful ready obedience to God's Law; he worshipped God in all appointed ways; he ever looked to Him as to a friend. And he is traditionally described as a preacher of judgment (Jude 14), proclaiming the truth of recompense, saying, 'God is Judge, God will surely repay.' Thus living, thus teaching, he was removed from the world suddenly and peacefully into another and a better condition, and, it would seem, without encountering death or, at least, the stroke or terror of death. His was another way into the kingdom, a way different from the dark valley which ordinary mortals tread. Still, our God is the same as his. God is our Friend. We do not refuse to die, since Christ has been by that road.

25. And Methuselah lived an hundred eighty and seven years, and begat Lamech: 26. And Methuselah lived after he begat Lamech seven hundred eighty and two years, and begat sons and daughters: 27. And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died.

This was the longest life of man; in what actions and surroundings did it pass? was it not a heavy burden, lasting so long? It must have ended in the dark days immediately preceding the Flood, when evil had corrupted the whole world. What thoughts, what hopes, what memories did this longest lived among men retain to cheer him in that long decay? Be sure of this, that faith, and

the fear of God, and the performance of duty, and the practice of patience, were sufficient to employ even such a long life ; it was but a preparation, a portal, in which man got ready for somewhat to come.

28. *And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son :* 29. *And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.* 30. *And Lamech lived after he begat Noah five hundred ninety and five years, and begat sons and daughters :* 31. *And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy and seven years : and he died.* 32. *And Noah was five hundred years old : and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*

Here is a gleam of hope, a promise of comfort. Religion was waning from the earth, troubles and sins were increasing. The family of Cain rejoiced over the inventions and discoveries whereby they ruled the world ; but the family of Seth sighed over God's wrath and the signs of it which they noted about them. Lamech trusted that his son would introduce a blessing, obtain a fuller promise, become the herald of hope ; and this he actually did, after he had first been the herald of judgment. He received a new covenant, became the lord of a purified earth. In looking back on the chapter, I see that it spans a long period, but gives next to no details ; that it records lives of immense length, yet all ending at last ; that it gives hints of faith and worship and hope among primitive men. His servants of old time are still living in God's sight. He whom they served has not forgotten them.

CHAPTER VI

1. The wickedness of the world, which provoked God's wrath, and caused the flood. 8. Noah findeth grace. 14. The order, form, and end of the ark.

AND it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, 2. That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair ; and they took them wives of all which they chose.

Whatever is meant by this mysterious statement, I see this plainly, that all the evils which destroyed the primitive world came from unnatural and ill-assorted marriage. Carnal appetite drew these

'sons of God' to desire these 'daughters of men,' and from this union sprang families who lived without God, and threw off the restraints of Divine Law. Do Thou, dear Lord, direct the hearts of believing lads and girls that they may make their great choice of a helpmate for life with serious thought and according to Thy will and favour. It is thus Thou wouldest have a people raised up to serve and praise Thee; thus Thy mercy will watch over their married life with its changes and chances.

3. *And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.*

Man had become flesh, therefore he offered no home for Divine indwelling, no sphere for God's Spirit to influence him; therefore the very breath of life which God had given him should be now withdrawn; therefore his days should diminish, his end draw near. There are certain sins which turn the soul or spirit of man to flesh, and expel all higher desires and thoughts. When a thought of good, a call from on high, enters the mind of those who live for fleshly sins, there is no answering emotion, no power to welcome the Divine inspiration. The intelligence, indeed, discusses, appreciates, takes interest; but the power of choice is gone, the soul can no longer decide, cannot be moved to fruitful repentance. After a while the heavenly visitor retires with no good done, and the soul returns to its vile slavery. O Lord, from such bondage set me free and keep me free!

4. *There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.*

These giants were heroes of the old time, were mighty in strength, fierce and terrible to their foes, they prided themselves on renowned feats of valour; but they had no thought for justice, mercy, truth; they had lost hold of true religion. Where now is their fame gone? Not even their names remain. A little act of mercy, a venture of faith, a brave stand made for Christ by some humble soul, will last and win praise, when all the glory of giants and heroes has vanished.

5. *And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* 6. *And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.*

Our God is the living God. He feels wrath at our sins; He changes His purpose if we change our ways; He is pleased with obedience,

is influenced by prayer. But am I not thus importing human frailty into the notion of the all-perfect, unchangeable, all-knowing God? Am I right in saying that God repents, or grieves, or is made angry? Indeed, these are human phrases and modelled on our infirmities; but yet they express a truth in God's nature. I cannot know Him as He is, nor comprehend His whole Being; but I am sure that He hates evil, compassionates sorrow, is able to punish or to forgive. The vision of His Divine Son in the Holy Gospel confirms this representation to me. I behold in the Lord Jesus One Who hates hypocrisy, Who welcomes duty, Who foretells judgments and mercies, forgives the penitent, shows a pattern of love—in that portrait my God is visibly made known.

7. *And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them.* 8. *But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*

This is the prediction of that great catastrophe wherein 'the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished'; and I know that a like sentence has gone out foretelling the destruction of the present world by fire, though I know not the time of its fulfilment. And as surely as Noah and his family found grace in that old-time judgment, so surely will Christ's family—those who bear His Name, cling to His Cross, trust His promise—be preserved safe through whatever convulsions may await the present world. I do not fear the coming wrath, so long as Christ is my Friend, and I hidden and purified in Him.

9. *These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.* 10. *And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth.*

Here begins the history of the Flood. Many nations of East and West had traditions of this great judgment, and of the escape of one family from it, with the creatures they preserved along with them. Even the details in these accounts have a wonderful resemblance to that preserved in Scripture. Abraham, who was brought up in Mesopotamia, had learnt this history and transmitted it to his descendants. It begins with a notice of Noah's uprightness and piety, and of the names of his three sons. It goes on to tell both of judgments and of mercies.

11. *The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.* 12. *And God looked upon the earth,*

and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

How different an aspect had the world in the eyes of man and in the eyes of God. Men 'did eat and drink; they bought, they sold; they married, they gave in marriage'; all seemed to go on in perfect security; the fair earth yielded her fruit; the race of Cain had invented arts and crafts. But in God's sight the earth appeared as before the Creation—formless and desolate, a heap of confusion, a realm of darkness. Where was natural religion gone? what had become of the witness which man's inward nature bears to purity and mercy? Alas! all the inward fabric of natural duty and reverence had been swallowed up by a flood of sin.

13. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them: and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

Just as unalterably is God's judgment fixed to destroy this present world in which I live; just as unalterable is His decree that I must die; but yet His promises are as fundamental as His wrath. I know that my sins deserve death, my frailty assures me of it; but now that manhood is joined to Godhead, I cling to the sympathy of that One Man, my Redeemer, Who intercedes for man's faults, Who preserves His servants through convulsions of nature, through experiences of decay. Because He lives, we shall live also.

14. Make thee an ark of gopher wood: rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. 15. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. 16. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

Here are the outlines of that saving Wood which was to convey redeemed mankind over the waters of judgment into a new and purified world; here is sketched out the City of God about to float on the turbid waves of life—the ark of Christ's Church into which our Baptism admits us. I see, in this sacred ship into which man and animals are admitted for refuge, a figure of the union of believers with Christ and with each other. Its timbers are stout and incorruptible, like the patience of a Christian; its breadth is great, like all-embracing charity; its great length tells of the long

perseverance of prayer ; its height suggests heavenward desires ;—all is order there, each soul has its due place, each feeling and capacity can be utilised and turned to good. Christ presides over all and makes all acceptable to His Father.

17. *And behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven ; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.*

18. *But with thee will I establish My covenant : and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.*

From the universal doom one man is exempted : he alone is pure and righteous ; for his merits mercy is extended to his family. He builds the ark in which the sacred society is contained. He links together two ages—the old and the new world. For him wild beasts forget their natural fierceness and become tractable ; unclean and clean find a home with him. He receives and shares with his children God's promises of unchanging mercy ; for him wrath is put away and love shines forth. Whom does faith discern figured here ? Who is it Who consecrated the saving Wood and made it become our refuge from floods of evil ?

19. *And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee : they shall be male and female.* 20. *Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive.* 21. *And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee : and it shall be for food for thee, and for them.* 22. *Thus did Noah ; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.*

Noah obeyed by faith. Natural reason would not have told him of any such preceding catastrophe, or would have made him doubt the possibility of collecting and preserving so many creatures. All those among whom he lived mocked at the tidings of coming destruction ; but he continued strong in faith and made all preparation, nor did he cease to warn men of the approaching judgment of God. He is an example of a believer committing all things to God's hands, and careful only to obey and do the best, sure that Omnipotence will turn all things to good, whether our human prevision succeeds or fails. Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend the issue of my care and forethought ; be it mine only to obey and trust.

CHAPTER VII

1. Noah, with his family, and the living creatures, enter into the ark.
 17. The beginning, increase, and continuance of the flood.

AND *the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation.*

The same dread voice which had long before bidden him plan and construct this ark told him that now the time was come to use it. God had found him righteous, and therefore saved him, and his family for his sake. God says: 'Here is your shelter and your safeguard; here is the home prepared, whose walls will keep you safe from the coming ruin!' O Lord, the ark of the Church which Thou hast prepared for my rescue from 'this troublesome world' differs from that of Noah in that it is wholly of Thy preparing, not mine. The saving Wood of the Cross that is honoured there has efficacy by Thy sole appointment and the virtue of Thy Sacrifice; nor have I, as Noah had, any merits that claim an entrance. I bring nought but vileness and folly; but I obey Thy command to enter and trust.

2. Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. 3. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.

Then there were already some creatures distinguished as clean, and so fit to be offered in sacrifice, others as unclean, and the ark was open to receive both. So it is with the Visible Church, of which the ark was a figure. There all manner of characters are found, true and false, devout and indevout. Let us keep ourselves for a 'living sacrifice' to God, holy and undefiled. He made us, and He would receive us as a living and reasonable sacrifice, daily offered with the fire of love and in union with the all-prevailing merits of Christ. What there has been unclean in us He can purge away.

4. For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights: and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.
5. And Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded

him. 6. And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.

Our Lord has taught us that 'as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.' We are bidden, therefore, to take that judgment as a type of the Last Day; to take heed of warnings as Noah did, not despise them as did the ungodly; to watch, to obey, and so find safety. That ancient destruction began at the appointed time after the seven days' warning; but the end of the world, or my own death, which ends the world to me, are unrevealed as to their date. All I know is that the hour of death and the day of judgment are grave realities: that all I see will pass away and I with it. What folly, then, to act and live as if this world were my eternal mansion!

7. And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. 8. Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth, 9. There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah.

During this seven days' respite, Noah received and settled those creatures who were to share his refuge. Once all the creatures had come to Adam to be named, in the days of his innocence, when he was lord of all; but now they came to Noah, Adam's descendant, and more faithful than he, to require his service in their preservation. Adam ruled and lost the rule. Noah had to provide, to minister, to humbly wait on the creatures; he 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,' and this is a safer way.

10. And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth. 11. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. 12. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

Here are the laws reversed which God made at the Creation: the dry land disappears, the seas break from their bed. Then God can, when He pleases, change the conditions which prevail around us, and under which the life of man and creatures goes on. Yes, indeed, if my experience were wider, if I had eyes to survey other ages or other worlds than this, what marvellous variations of existence might I not behold! All I know is, that God exists unchanged, and so does the soul that trusts Him. Fire nor water, rending sky nor dissolving globe, can altogether destroy

love. If my God is mine and I am His, I shall view the ruin of visible things without terror.

13. In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark; 14. They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort. 15. And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life. 16. And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the Lord shut him in.

As these entered the ark, so do I enter God's House; it rises up for me as a refuge amidst the threatening storms of life. The Font reminds me of those who 'were saved by water' in the old days; the Altar tells me of the nourishment God has prepared to sustain me; from the pulpit come proclamations of mercy and judgment. If I leave the shadow of these sacred walls and let my Sundays be wholly swallowed up by the ungodly world, then my peace, my character, my hope, will be endangered too. Glory to Thee, O Lord, Who hast prepared this refuge for me! Let me bring to it and take from it thoughts of peace, encouragements to do well in the coming week.

17. And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth. 18. And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. 19. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth: and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. 20. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail: and the mountains were covered.

The increase of the terrible Flood served but to uphold the ark. The fiercest winds and currents only drifted it on its appointed way. When all without was blank desolation, hope prevailed within. So it is with the great afflictions that God sends upon His Church or upon the believing soul,—all these are overruled to good,—all these are designed to overwhelm what is evil in us and exalt us heavenward. When all that I leant on is blighted or is swallowed up, I will cling the closer to my God, will be all the more at home in the ark which He has provided for my soul. One day my body will turn to corruption, one day all this earth on which I live will perish, but I am safe in my Father's hand.

21. *And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man:* 22. *All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.* 23. *And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.* 24. *And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.*

This was a general and indiscriminate ruin; but in the judgment to come each one will be called to account by himself. This overwhelmed many who had not themselves directly deserved God's wrath; they perished as to their bodies in the Flood, which swept away a world of unrighteousness; but in that great day to come, each will receive his own deserts—each will be saved or lost according to his heart's choice of good or evil. As the deluge of water in old time consumed all the settlements of men, so will a deluge of fire one day overtake the whole world. I stand between the one and the other. It would be folly for me to gaze idly on approaching destruction; nay, I seek the ark of safety, I rejoice to find myself sheltered within its walls, I trust to my God to keep me safe there. As the waters of the Flood prevailed, so unrighteousness seems to prevail now; yet God's servants look forward to His vindication of His truth. They know that He is righteous, and is pleased with blameless souls.

CHAPTER VIII

1. The waters asswage. 4. The ark resteth on Ararat. 7. The raven and the dove. 15. Noah, being commanded, 18. goeth forth of the ark. 20. He buildeth an altar, and offereth sacrifice, 21. which God accepteth, and promiseth to curse the earth no more.

AND God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged;

I am within the ark, thank God for it. I carry with me the remembrance of past mercies, the hope of good things to come. Every day God's Church becomes more precious. I delight in the order, the praises, the instructions of God's sanctuary. Christ is my

Noah, the Captain of my salvation, the Head of the believing family. Leaning on Him, I fear not the storms which rage outside ; God will assuage them in His good time. He regards me as united to His Son, and well pleasing to Him for His Son's sake.

2. The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained : 3. And the waters returned from off the earth continually : and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. 4. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. 5. And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month : in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the top of the mountains seen.

Here is a Columbus seeking for a new world ; here is a voyager freighted with a precious cargo, with a unique burden of memories and hopes. Noah kept a record of all that passed ; he noted the time as it passed by, watched for the signs of the lessening flood. In the New Testament I have read (Acts xxvii.) of St. Paul's voyage and shipwreck as he bore gospel tidings from East to West. I find there the details of his voyage, the fluctuations of the weather, the shipwreck at last on the shore of Malta. He, too, had a special treasure of truth to cherish, was upheld by a special promise of protection.

6. And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made : 7. And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth. 8. Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground ; 9. But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth : then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.

Noah had with him the raven and the dove ; he sent forth first the one and then the other. Ancient writers see in these two birds, preserved in the ark, a figure of two different sorts of Christians who exist in God's Church. The raven, with its black colour, its harsh voice, its love for carrion, differs from the gentle dove, the pet and friend of man. So, in the Church, there are Christians who are but Christians in name, who disturb the harmony of the prayers, who attach themselves to the world's corruptions—their

real home is not in the ark, they are glad to be free from its restraint. But there are other souls who rejoice in God's mercies, who live in simplicity and peace, who find themselves at home in God's House, who feel that they are strangers and pilgrims in the world—these are figured by the dove.

10. *And he stayed yet other seven days : and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark ;* 11. *And the dove came in to him in the evening : and lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off : so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth.* 12. *And he stayed yet other seven days : and sent forth the dove : which returned not again unto him any more.*

The olive leaf was a sign of reconciliation, a proof that God had made peace with His creatures. The dove bearing the olive leaf reminds me of that Holy Spirit of peace, Who tells us of hope, Who points us towards the heavenly country. The dove came back no more, because the ark is but meant for our sojourn. Our rest is not here : there is a land beyond the sea—a new life that dawns on us now, and will one day shine forth in all its beauty. When that is revealed, the Church and its ordinances will have passed away and heavenly realities come instead.

13. *And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth : and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry.* 14. *And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried.*

During the year and ten days that had passed, Noah and his family had been alone with thoughts of God, with fear and awe of His judgments, with growing hopes of new life and fresh mercies. He was not quite the same as he had been, such a season had left deep traces on his heart ; he remembered the days and events which had marked different stages in his sojourn. So I desire, when sickness and danger are over, when trials have passed, to recall what I felt then, to remember those hours when I prayed from my heart, when I leant only on God for succour. The Flood has passed, but God remains an unchanging Friend. He is my Refuge in time and eternity.

15. *And God spake unto Noah, saying,* 16. *Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee.* 17. *Bring forth with thee every living thing that*

is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth.

The voice which had bade him take refuge speaks now and bids him leave it. He had been faithful to this heavenly Guide, and would not take a fresh step without the same direction. No doubt some apprehension held him back—was the judgment really past? would earth resume her wonted garb, yield her produce as of old? He recalled those days when he had gazed round the horizon vainly seeking for some landmark, some trace of life, and feared lest they should recur; but no, God bade him venture forth in trust and peace. When He calls, a new pursuit, a new home, a new life beyond the grave become familiar to the soul; we venture forth and lay aside fear; warnings turn for us into blessings.

18. And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: 19. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.

‘How joyful from the imprisoning ark
On the green earth they spring.’

Noah rejoiced to feel, as did the Good Shepherd (St. John xviii. 9), ‘Of those which Thou gavest Me have I lost none.’ He was as careful over the meanest as the greatest creatures. This occasion seemed to him like a fresh Creation; like that moment of which he had heard by tradition from Paradise, when all the creatures were first marshalled in the perfected world. He had foreshadowings of a new heaven and new earth, which should come when all this world shall have passed away.

20. And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

An altar is the first erection in the restored and purified world. By it Noah dedicated afresh to God himself and all that he had; he expressed in this sacrifice his gratitude, his submission, his desire to give up himself to God’s good pleasure all his days. Had he some dim thoughts of a better offering—a blood-shedding more efficacious—which time and grace should bring? The animals fit for sacrifice were spared from the Flood, but only to be immolated at its conclusion. Their greater excellence brought them death; they were chosen to express man’s self-oblation. Why do God’s

servants murmur when He chooses them out for suffering and seems to spare the profane? Is it not a glory to suffer for Him, and in dependence on His will?

21. *And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake: for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth: neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.* 22. *While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

In the prevailing virtue of this sacrifice of praise which penetrated heaven, and drew down a favouring answer, I see shadowed forth the power of Christ's own offering, which is ever living and mighty.

'The offering smokes through earth and skies,
Diffusing life and joy and peace;
To these His lower courts it comes,
And fills them with Divine perfumes.'

It reverses the doom of justice, turns wrath into love, obtains everlasting life. What Noah won was a promise of temporal Providence, that the fair earth should go on its way as heretofore, should produce and nourish creatures; but what I receive in Christ is the assurance of an everlasting Love, an unfailing Righteousness.

CHAPTER IX

1. God blesseth Noah. 4. Blood and murder are forbidden. 8. God's covenant, 13. signified by the rainbow. 18. Noah replenisheth the world, 20. planteth a vineyard, 21. is drunken, and mocked of his son, 25. curseth Canaan, 26. blesseth Shem, 27. prayeth for Japheth, 29. and dieth.

AND God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, *Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.* 2. *And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand are they delivered.*

Here is God's primal blessing renewed to man; here is given again the command to increase and fill the earth, and the position of

sovereignty over all the other creatures of God. God mercifully restores man to that level whence he had fallen by sin, gives him confidence to go forth and turn the world to his purposes. By these words man is encouraged to subdue nature, is bidden to baffle her wiles and turn her treasures to his use. If I do not yet see all things put under him, yet it is in Christ that man is perfected. He, when He appeared, walked through the world as its Lord; in Him I claim my right; to Him I look for an eternal inheritance. The promises made to man find their full realisation in Him Who is pure and perfect man, yet Divine.

3. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you : even as the green herb have I given you all things. 4. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

This precept, not to eat of blood, and therefore not of any meat from which the blood has not been let out, was strictly renewed under the Law (Lev. xvii. 10-12); and the Apostles, in like manner, enjoined it on their Gentile converts (Acts xv. 29), so that they should not vex Jewish Christians by doing what was abominable in their eyes. Yet it has always been held to be a precept of positive appointment only, and not permanently binding on Christians. It was enjoined because under the Law atonement was made by shedding of blood—blood spoke of expiation. But now that Christ has paid our ransom once for all, there is no further need of propitiation by blood; saving only this, that at the Christian altar Christ's Atoning Blood, of infinite virtue, is in a mystery presented to God and partaken of by us, that our souls may be cleansed from sin.

5. And surely your blood of your lives will I require : at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man : at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. 6. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed : for in the image of God made He man. 7. And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply : bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.

If human life is of such awful sanctity, and to be guarded and avenged so strictly, what shall we say of those causeless and cruel wars which have cut life down by the thousand? what of those blood-thirsty penal laws which sacrificed life for a trifle of property? what of the preventible scourges of disease and misery which rage among the destitute? Does not God, who made man's body and soul so wonderfully that in man He might be visibly represented, look upon each human being with love and bid us reverence His Image?

In a child, in a poor destitute person, in one who has gone grievously astray, in one who is aged and childish, I yet behold the likeness of my God—a creature to be honoured and served for God's sake.

8. *And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying,* 9. *And I, behold I establish My covenant with you and with your seed after you ;* 10. *And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you ; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth.* 11. *And I will establish My covenant with you ; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood ; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.*

Here is a promise made by God, freely and mercifully, and not depending on the merits of man. Whatever faults Noah's posterity should commit, yet still the promise shall stand sure. Nor does it depend on those who benefit by it knowing about it ; no, many have not learnt at all about their God and His promised mercy, and yet the covenant stands sure with them. Here I behold God making a promise to man, standing forth and promising him safety from any recurrence of the devouring Flood. Here I discern a figure of the wider, deeper, more blessed promise which He has exhibited to me in Christ Jesus, and which pledges me deliverance from eternal loss.

12. *And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations :* 13. *I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth.*

Here is 'the faithful witness in heaven'; here is the bow which clothes in symbolic representation the throne of God as Ezekiel and St. John saw it ; here is a token that lasts on till the end of the world. This is the first sacrament of God's Love ; the 'outward and visible sign' of God's mercy, ordained by Him to have that meaning. It is a work of God alone, not wrought by human skill. It rests on a dark background of cloud ; when all is fair, we do not see it ; so God's mercy is realised by us out of trouble and remorse. Blessed be God for thus linking this familiar and beautiful sight with thoughts of His faithfulness, His mercy!

14. *And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud :* 15. *And I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and*

every living creature of all flesh ; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16. And the bow shall be in the cloud ; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

Jesus is to us what the rainbow was to believers in early days. He tempers the dazzling rays of Godhead by the clouds of His Sacred Humanity. He pledges God's Love to us. He testifies God's Truth. He represents to God and to us the eternal promise of pardon. How high is He, yet touching earth ! How bright, yet to be gazed on by our weak sight ! How connected with thoughts of judgment, yet of mercy too ! How able to propitiate God and to encourage us ! I delight in the rays of this 'soft undazzling light,' wherein is all my security and peace.

17. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

Yet the rainbow is formed by natural laws of light : it is but the product of the beams of light broken by the falling rain. True ; but nature is God's appointment, and shows forth His wisdom and power. By taking this natural phenomenon, so beautiful and so common, for His token of covenant, God pledges Himself that the natural order shall continue. In nature God's Face is veiled from us, or but dimly seen amidst many dark clouds ; but in Gospel mysteries He is more clearly revealed. Still even here there are clouds, though with bright beams glancing through them. I wait in patience till the clouds pass away.

18. And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth : and Ham is the father of Canaan. 19. These are the three sons of Noah : and of them was the whole earth overspread.

From hence mankind started afresh. All the great histories, great dynasties, great works of the post-diluvian world, which man's vain traditions have clothed with divinity, made to extend over immortal ages, must be brought down within five thousand years before Christ. The earth itself has existed for ages beyond counting. Creatures, too, of all sorts have been born and have perished during countless ages ; but our race is a much more modern production, our history much shorter than that of the beasts. Behold man started afresh after his great catastrophe, dispersed abroad and resettling the earth, carrying with him everywhere the same hopes, thoughts, joys, and fears, the same upward look, the same frailty and mortality. He sets forth to perform his Maker's bidding, and conquer a home and livelihood for himself.

20. *And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard :*

Noah's great age and his dignity as the new head of mankind did not dispense him from labour. He returned to it with zeal after his deliverance. He regarded it as God's appointment for him ; he passed readily from worship to work, and from work to worship again. Even while his hands were busy, his heart was often uplifted to God.

21. *And he drank of the wine, and was drunken ; and he was uncovered within his tent.* 22. *And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.*

In Noah, naked and helpless, overcome by this new, sweet, potent gift, subject to the mockery of his profane son, I behold Christ Jesus hanging on the Cross, stripped and forsaken, ridiculed by His enemies, treated with inextinguishable scorn as a detected impostor. He had drunk deeply of the cup of humiliation, so that for our sakes He appeared in utter abasement. Nor has the scandal of the Cross ceased yet : to how many is it too hard a lesson, too confounding an experience !—they cannot discern God there.

23. *And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father ; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.*

Here is the attitude of Faith. Faith adores the humiliation of the Incarnate Son, reverences all the particulars of His abasement ; but does not attempt to comprehend or explain anything there. Faith has its own modesty, leaves mysteries veiled, submits and obeys rather than lays down the law. Give me, Lord, the prompt reverence and dutifulness which these two good sons showed ; let me, in dealing with truths of religion, behave reverently as I would towards persons whom age or duty bids me reverence. I would come into Thy House with adoration, behave there with respect and gravity, speak of mysteries with humble submission.

24. *And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.* 25. *And he said, Cursed be Canaan ; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.*

What this signified in Noah's malediction was the low and mean condition, the subject state to which Ham's descendants should fall.

They should be set beneath the descendants of Shem and of Japheth, should supply them with slaves, fall beneath them in endowments. But do not think that it remains unrevoked. Oh no ! Abraham's promised Seed has brought a blessing to all nations, which has more than done away with the curse. Do not think it justifies slavery and slave-dealing. Oh no ! Christ Jesus has taken humanity into oneness with Himself and glorified it. Canaan's descendants are His brethren. He has revived the Image of God in which they were made.

26. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem ; and Canaan shall be his servant. 27. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem ; and Canaan shall be his servant.

Out of the descendants of Shem came Ahraham's family, among whom the True God was revealed and worshipped. The descendants of Japheth have become the leading nations of Europe and America, in whom humanity has reached its highest intellectual range, and who have subdued the earth before them. To Shem fell the religious leadership of the world ; to Japheth the royalty of art, learning, government. Ham and his posterity have fallen behind both these. When the fulness of time was come the sons of Japheth passed over and occupied that revelation which God had made to the race of Shem ; they entered it and dwelt there as in their own.

28. And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. 29. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years : and he died.

In this prolonged life Noah handed down memories of the old world, thoughts of God's mercy, instructions how to serve Him, hopes of a Redeemer to come. He lived so long that the great Flood receded into the dim past, and he could scarcely think that it was he who had experienced it. But both he and I have yet to pass through another catastrophe which exceeds that in terror and in universality. He will rise from his grave, I from mine, when the Last Day comes. He will give account for his nine hundred and fifty years, I for my span, whatever it be.

CHAPTER X

1. The generations of Noah. 2. The sons of Japheth. 6. The sons of Ham. 8. Nimrod the first monarch. 21. The sons of Shem.

NOW *these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood.*

Does this chapter merely contain a dry and formal register of nations, a category of the tribes who settled in this or that part of the known world? No. There is here a pervading sense of the oneness of mankind—men are brethren, descended from one stock, have common sympathies, a common interest in Divine Mercy. Do not think that any nations, however far distant, ignorant, superstitious, in darkness, are outside God's mercy. His Son was incarnate for all; His Spirit breathes in all. This document gives us a brief account of the tribes who dwelt within the writer's horizon, and traces their descent to one or other of Noah's sons. Thoughts about judgment, about mercy, about one God, about prayer, went with them in their dispersion. Not all nations that dwell on the globe are mentioned in this chapter; not the Indians (Esther i. 1), nor the Chinese (Isaiah xlix. 12), nor the negroes, nor the Malayan or American tribes; but we infer from what is told us here, and from what science and reason tell us, that men are all of one stock and have a common capacity for apprehending God's truth.

2. The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras. 3. And the sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah. 4. And the sons of Javan; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. 5. By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

The children of Japheth went towards north and west; they filled Central Asia, Armenia, Asia Minor, the coasts of the Black Sea and the Ægean; they gradually settled the countries of Europe; it is likely that they occupied India also. For these races God had a great future in reserve—He stored up for them triumphs of intellect, of government; He reserved the distant future for them; He bade them succeed, later on, to the inheritance of the earth, when the ancient Eastern empires had passed away. The Prophets tell me that it is God Who gives or takes away empires, that it is

not our mere initiative but His Providence that settles the world's destinies. To what nation I belong, what hereditary gifts or tendencies I have, is His ordering, but yet I have my own tongue and hand to rule, my own character to mould. He Who has made and governs all is yet my Friend.

6. *And the sons of Ham ; Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan.* 7. *And the sons of Cush ; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabtechah : and the sons of Raamah ; Sheba, and Dedan.*

The children of Ham peopled Egypt, North Africa, Phœnicia, parts of Arabia and Mesopotamia. To them God gave the earliest empires, the first developments of civilisation. Among them sprang up early marvels of art and grandeur ; the time for the sons of Japheth and the sons of Shem to influence the world was not yet come. God bade them wait for the appointed season. In His sight nations grow and decay ; they spring up and flourish in youth and energy like individual men ; He sees their mature years, their dissolution, and yet deals with each soul of whom they are made up.

8. *And Cush begat Nimrod : he began to be a mighty one in the earth.* 9. *He was a mighty hunter before the Lord : wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.* 10. *And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.* 11. *Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah,* 12. *And Resen between Nineveh and Calah : the same is a great city.*

In these verses is noted the first beginning of the mighty empires of Babylon and Assyria, which grew to a great height,

‘hiding the glorious sky
from half the nations.’

Babylon began first, then Assyria was founded from it and grew greater than it ; then Assyria's turn came to pass away, while Babylon remained for a while ; finally Babylon too fell and became desolate. Of all the many centuries that rolled over those two empires, the mighty cities, gorgeous palaces, successful wars, trains of prisoners and spoil, there remain but few relics. Yet our own day has seen disinterred figures, inscriptions, ornaments, ruins, which tell of that old-world grandeur, built in tears and blood. Contrast Nimrod with Abraham, whose history begins in the next chapter ; they both came from the same region ; the one was a mighty hunter, warrior, spoiler, and enslaver of men ; he heaped up plunder and glory. The other lived a life of peace,

of humble industry, of communing with God. On whose side are we ranked? which of the two could claim us as his?

13. *And Mizraim begat Ludim, and Anamin, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim,* 14. *And Pathrusim, and Casluhim (out of whom came Philistim) and Caphtorim.*

These are different tribes of Egypt or the countries bordering on Egypt. Among them rapidly sprang up luxury and scientific skill. Already in Egypt, four thousand years before Christ, there was a great monarch, display of wealth, great builders, great artists. This world's culture rapidly ripened there. It was reserved for humble souls who regarded themselves as strangers and sojourners, on whose history we shall enter at the end of the next chapter, to lay the foundations of our heavenward knowledge; but this is the most important to us.

15. *And Canaan begat Sidon his firstborn, and Heth,* 16. *And the Jebusite, and the Amorite, and the Girgasite,* 17. *And the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite,* 18. *And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite: and afterward were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad.* 19. *And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha.* 20. *These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations.*

When I read this list of the Phœnician, Hittite, Canaanite tribes, my mind dwells not on the mercantile glory of Tyre and Sidon (Ezekiel xxvii.), not on the sins and doom of the Canaanites, but on that Syrophœnician or Canaanite woman whose marvellous faith and perseverance won a blessing from the Lord, or on those devout Tyrians (Acts xxi. 5), or hospitable Sidonians (Acts xxvii. 3), who loved and welcomed the great Apostle of the Gentiles; in such persons grace overcame the defects of nature.

21. *Unto Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were children born.* 22. *The children of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram.* 23. *And the children of Aram; Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash.* 24. *And Arphaxad begat Salah; and Salah begat Eber.* 25. *And unto Eber were born two sons: and the name of one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.* 26. *And Joktan begat Almodad, and Sheleph,*

and Hazarmaveth, and Jerah, 27. And Hadoram, and Uzal, and Diklah, 28. And Obal, and Abimael, and Sheba, 29. And Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab: all these were the sons of Joktan. 30. And their dwelling was from Mesha, as thou goest unto Sephar, a mount of the east. 31. These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations.

The children of Shem formed the stock whence were drawn the chosen seed; but besides Abraham's family they sent forth the dwellers in many regions, eastward, northward, and southward. Among them were reckoned the founders of Persian, Syrian, Lydian, and Arabian nations—nay, they colonised Indian and African coasts. God, Who made all nations and spread them abroad, gave to each people its national characteristics, its capacities, its fortunes in history. He set them 'that they might feel after Him and find Him,' that they might live according to His law. When His due time came, He revealed to them the powerful and saving remedy of His Holy Gospel.

32. These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.

Why has God set some nations with so many more advantages of position, of culture, of strength than others? Nay, why has He given me such blessings of parentage, education, evangelical truth? Why has His partial mercy brought me back to Him, while others seem left to their own wanderings? Indeed I know not; but I adore that Providence which is above my understanding. I am persuaded that He deals wisely and justly with all, no less where I cannot trace His dealings than where I can. I set my life and destiny in His hands, and prepare to give account to Him for all.

CHAPTER XI

1. One language in the world. 3. The building of Babel. 5. The confusion of tongues. 10. The generations of Shem. 27. The generations of Terah the father of Abram. 51. Terah goeth from Ur to Haran.

AND *the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.*

What was that earliest language? We know not—nor how it was framed,—but God had endowed man with this gift that he could

speak, could name things, could communicate his ideas. In that earliest tongue words were found to preserve the tradition of a Creator, a Fall, a Deluge, words expressing love, duty, compassion, the common toils and objects of life. Nations of the earth, however widely dispersed, however ignorant and degraded, were not left without some traces of a common ancient inheritance of thought. Glory be to God for the great gift of speech! It is now perfected and enriched so as to be a fit vehicle for conveying His truth to hearts.

2. *And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.* 3. *And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.* 4. *And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*

Here we find the origin of the earthly Babylon, the city of confusion, the type of this world's glory. Towards the end of this same chapter we find first mentioned the name of him whom God called to found the heavenly city, the community of believers. The city of this world has infinite glory, numbers, splendour, renown. The fellowship of true believers which Abraham founded looks poor and humble in comparison; and yet it lasts on, nay, will outlast the other. The city and tower of the ambitious builders which rose on the Chaldean plain is but a heap of ruins now; but faith and patience can climb to God's throne.

5. *And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.*

God had to come down to see it,—it was a trifle after all when viewed from heaven; but He did come,—that is, He visited and judged the design. The builders did not know of that Psalm which says 'Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it.' They did not consider Him Who was considering them. Many of our ambitious schemes so take up our mind that they obscure the thought of the All-seeing God; but we who build are only 'children of men,' frail and feeble, not able to give to our undertakings a permanent abiding character.

6. *And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined*

to do. 7. *Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.*

Man had said, 'Come, let us build,' God said, 'Come, let us overthrow.'

How different from this tower and city of confusion are the schemes which find favour in God's sight! I should reckon that a plan had God's favour which was begun with prayer, and with a deep distrust of self, and in a spirit of charity to others, and with a pervading submission to Him Who disposes all things well. Such plans, such hopes, even if they fail, are not overthrown but overruled and directed to other good ends. Out of the ruins of our attempts God can frame the walls of the everlasting city.

8. *So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.*

9. *Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.*

O Lord, reverse for believers this judgment; make them to understand the needs of others, the wants and aspirations of men, and so supply the truths and gifts which our confused age needs. Thou Who knowest all men's hearts, impart this knowledge in its degree to those who profess Thy Name, that they may be able to aid their brethren to believe. This strange marvel of the confused dialects and broken hopes of the Babel builders makes me think of the day of Pentecost and its gift of tongues. That made different languages serve, in ecstasy, for union not confusion—made them declare the wonderful works and glorious praises of God, made them a sign of the Spirit's unifying, healing work. After this verse the history leaves other races and limits itself to that family only to whom the treasure of faith and the hope of Redemption are committed; other races are a prey to confusion; in this alone is some hope of peace.

10. *These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood: 11. And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. 12. And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah: 13. And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. 14. And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber: 15. And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters. 16. And Eber lived four and*

thirty years, and begat Peleg: 17. And Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters. 18. And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu: 19. And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters. 20. And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug: 21. And Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters. 22. And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor: 23. And Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. 24. And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah: 25. And Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters. 26. And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Here we leave the history of great empires, and confine ourselves to that line from which the Redeemer should spring; and yet of this we have no more than the succession of names and the age of each. We observe that life is continually growing shorter in the centuries after the Flood till it comes down at last to the same limit at which we find it now. We observe that the earlier Patriarchs, such as Noah and Shem, must have lived a long while with their descendants, must have preserved for them many traditions of primeval days. Having observed these things we hasten on to the birth of Abraham, through whom God was about to reveal Himself again to men.

27. Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. 28. And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. 29. And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. 30. But Sarai was barren; she had no child. 31. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. 32. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

God's call found the chosen family in Chaldea, the very centre of idolatry; the seat of Ninrod's first world-empire; the place where

the profane builders had left their unfinished tower. What an ordinary event it seemed that a family of shepherds should pass with their household and flocks up the course of the Euphrates, sojourn a while at Haran, then cross the Euphrates and travel westward, seeking for a new home! And yet among these unnoticed few were ears awake to listen to God's call, hearts receptive, ready for His revelation. Be sure that He had prepared listeners before He spoke. Gracious Lord, Who hast brought me now to the threshold of Abraham's history, wherein Thou wast made known again to men, may I learn to feel Thee near, true, righteous and merciful, as Abraham did. This God is my God. I too have been called out of the world to follow and serve Him.

CHAPTER XII

1. God calleth Abram, and blesseth him with a promise of Christ.
4. He departeth with Lot from Haran. 6. He journeyeth through Canaan, 7. which is promised him in a vision. 10. He is driven by a famine into Egypt. 11. Fear maketh him feign his wife to be his sister. 14. Pharaoh, having taken her from him, by plagues is compelled to restore her.

NOW *the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee :*

This voice came to Abraham without outward sound; his heart it was that heard. It came from an unknown Divine Friend, Who bade him trust and venture, bade him reach out into the unseen and believe that One Who loved him was near. Those among whom Abraham lived worshipped idols, but he could not be content with such worship as that, he sought for something which could satisfy his longings for Divine Communion. His feeling was 'My soul is athirst for God, yea even for the Living God'; and that God Whom he was feeling for, met and answered him.

2. *And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing :*

Here the future begins to open upon him; he looks onward, and lives by faith in what is yet far distant; he learns to put aside the present and prepare himself for great things to come. A great nation descended literally from him, and a still greater one spiritually,—that is, the innumerable company of those who share

his faith. Does not God recompense liberally those who venture at His call and trust in His promise? Abraham gave up much, but received infinitely more. He obtained undying honour, as our guide in the way of faith.

3. *And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

O great and wide blessing, stretching far and lasting long! It could not be spent merely upon Abraham's own personal fortunes, nor those of his descendants, the Jews. No, it extends to all who will accept it, and implies true peace, true joy, true freedom; and it is the Lord Jesus Who gives this blessing. He was born of Abraham's line 'after the flesh,' and yet came to bring 'good tidings of great joy' to all true hearts of every nation. God's blessing makes home prosperous and happy, crowns hearth and fold with plenty: and yet it is not perfect until it has set us at peace with our Maker, done away with the curse of sin.

4. *So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.*

Here is prompt obedience. Here is a congregation of faithful persons, united together in common submission to God's will, and faith in His everlasting promises. No doubt Abraham imparted to his family his own conviction that idols were vain, that it was needful to make a change and serve the true God elsewhere, and that this God had great things in store for His servants. May I, Lord, be ever joined to the company of those who obey Thee, though the world ignore or despise them.

5. *And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.*

Here first appears the Holy Land, the scene of many wonderful acts of God in old time, the place where God was served by saints of the old covenant, where our Divine Lord Himself passed the years of His mortal life, where the seed of the Gospel was first sown. Yet when Abraham visited it, he was a stranger there, and the land was possessed by idolaters and defiled by hideous crimes. Wherever Abraham came, he found God was there, the God Who had called him thither, and he paid worship to Him. His own tent was as a sanctuary amidst the surrounding floods of evil.

6. *And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.*

The holy household, wandering as strangers in a land which was to be their own, protected by an unseen Hand, guided without their own knowledge, remind us of the condition of Christians here below. We are strangers and sojourners, surrounded by the world's temptations, often bewildered and disappointed, yet we trust that God guides us to a good end, keeps us from being utterly lost. O God, bring us safely home at last !

7. *And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land : and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, Who appeared unto him.*

Since the loss of Eden this is the first recorded Vision of God to the sight of fallen man. How gracious is He to restore to us opportunities of Divine Communion, so as to fit us at the end for the uninterrupted sight of Him! This is the first altar erected in the Holy Land to the true God, whereon man could lay acceptable offerings in gratitude for Divine mercies. What mattered the enticements or threats of Canaanites to one who had learnt to look out for God's appearing? Here begins the worship of God in His own land, which Abraham takes possession of and consecrates to the Most High. From that one altar and act of worship have come our churches for the worship of God in every land.

8. *And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east : and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the Name of the Lord.*

On this mountain Abraham stood, and looked over that fair land which was one day to be his. Not far from this very place it must have been that Jacob lay down to sleep and saw the glorious vision. It was a sanctuary to the patriarchs. Yet Abraham did not remain there, he had to pass on ; his motto was,

‘I nightly pitch my moving tent
A day's march nearer home.’

He lived in that ancient world, yet not of it, for his thoughts were set on things to come.

9. *And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.*

So we too journey, O Lord. Sometimes our tent is pitched in a green valley, by a clear stream, under overshadowing boughs ;

all smiles on us, but we have to rise up and resume our march. Soon we come into dry places, have the desert round us. Glory be to Thee for the refreshments which we find by the way, for consolations found even in the desert, but what will not our home be, when we reach it !

10. *And there was a famine in the land : and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there ; for the famine was grievous in the land.*

Egypt was rich in corn. It was a great and settled state, the earliest in the ancient world. Its palaces, its temples, its great works, struck wonder to the traveller's mind. Yet, after all, we know that Pharaoh is not God ; he but represents, imperfectly, a greater majesty than his own. God's people remain undazzled before him, for they are accustomed to commune with the Most High.

11. *And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon : 12. Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife : and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. 13. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister : that it may be well with me for thy sake ; and my soul shall live because of thee.*

If Abraham lost courage when he thought of the power of sinful passion and the dangers of Egypt, if his faith faltered for a while, and he forgot the protection and promises of his heavenly Guide, we must not blame him overmuch. Indeed we, as we move amidst temptations, have to consider how to keep our soul safe, our heart pure, our life free from sin's bondage. If we are obliged to live and work for a while in Egypt, yet let our heart be fixed on a better place.

14. *And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. 15. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh : and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.*

Courtiers who ministered to their master's pleasure, a land where beauty was a snare, where power was above right, where a believer dared not speak the truth, what was Abraham doing among these ? Better for him to have remained in the desert. Pharaoh's house

was full of praise for Sarah's beauty and envy of her good fortune. But she herself looked to God for rescue ; she had no other friend, and He did not forsake her.

16. *And he entreated Abram well for her sake : and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maid-servants, and she asses, and camels.*

Abraham was enriched with costly presents ; Sarah honoured in the king's palace : who could not have thought them happy ? And yet this outward prosperity covered aching hearts. How different is men's real condition from that which strikes the outward eye ! God hears the cries of pain that go up to Him from many who live in splendour and are envied by the multitude. He does not forget the sorrows of those who trust Him.

17. *And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.*

So dear were God's elect to Him that ' He suffered no man to do them wrong, but reprov'd even kings for their sake.' He sent pain and danger upon king and court ; then they examined their ways and learnt what was amiss. So do thou, O Teacher of men, teach me.

18. *And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me ? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife ?* 19. *Why saidst thou, She is my sister ? so I might have taken her to me to wife : now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.*

I notice, with admiration, how heathen monarchs in the plenitude of their power had still great respect for the law which forbade the taking of another man's wife. Christians may well learn this lesson from them, now that such sins prevail and are treated lightly. I see how God dealt with Pharaoh by chastisements and warnings, and I too desire to profit by His grave and severe dealings with me. Pharaoh, in all his glory, was not above learning and acknowledging his fault.

20. *And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him : and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.*

Here is an exodus from Egypt, a figure of that of Abraham's descendants which took place long afterwards. Abraham breathed freely again, when the desert was round him and he had left behind the splendours and dangers of Pharaoh's court. In going down into Egypt, he had thought more of schemes for his own

advantage than of the duty of sincerity, yet God had turned evil to good and brought him safely through, for His Name's sake, for His promise's sake. With such thoughts, he felt himself more than ever the instrument of a Divine Power Who was guiding all things to a good end.

CHAPTER XIII

1. Abram and Lot return out of Egypt. 7. By disagreement they part asunder. 10. Lot goeth to wicked Sodom. 14. God reneweth the promise to Abram. 18. He removeth to Hebron, and there buildeth an altar.

AND Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.
2. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.

It is well to be safe out of Egypt, and started on our road heavenwards, but the world's possessions cling round our heart and put us in danger of forgetting heavenly promises. Here we find the first mention in Scripture of silver and gold. They are but counters, yet such as carry with them a great value by the common consent of mankind. Many have sold their souls to get store of these precious metals. We do not find that Abraham allowed his riches to make him forget God or the inheritance of promise. No, all that he possessed did not make him value less the treasures of faith, the blessing to come ; he knew those were the best riches.

3. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai ; 4. Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first : and there Abram called on the Name of the Lord.

This second altar which was erected to the true God became for the Patriarchs a sacred place, dear to them by holy memories. Let me so avail myself of God's House that I may return to it with joy, remembering what I have learnt there, what I have felt there. O God of Bethel, be Thou my God always ; let me hear from Thee a word of promise, let me devote myself to serve Thee faithfully, let me trust in Thy protecting care.

5. *And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.*

Lot had shared Abraham's wanderings, had learnt from him how to worship and serve God, had joined with him in prayer and good deeds. Now there came a trial upon him which proved what manner of man he was: whether he valued most his abundant flocks, or the possession of religious privileges, the right to God's future blessing. Lot, while he lived with Abraham, enjoyed the protection and the mercy which God bestowed on Abraham. When he threw up that society and took Sodom in exchange, he made a bad bargain.

6. *And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.* 7. *And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land.*

What, in the presence of the Canaanites, who doubtless scoffed, should God's household be divided, His servants at strife? Here are sad consequences of too much wealth. When Lot was poor and dependent on his uncle, no such troubles had appeared, but they came with prosperous days. Thus the servants of Abraham and Lot, who joined together to worship the one true God, could not bear each other, and got to variance, almost to blows!

8. *And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.*

Brethren, both in blood and in faith; we have common blood in our veins, and are joined together yet more closely as servants of the one true God and heirs of the promise; we must not strive about this world's advantages, lest we lose substance for shadow. If believers had always stopped the beginning of strife, after Abraham's method, this would be a happier world than it is. In many families brethren have been divided and made enemies by some question of profit or division of wealth. God's children hate and revile each other, and all for some trifle.

9. *Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.*

'Choose,' he said, 'let us only remain friends. Let us part for a while, in order to be still joined in heart. I give the choice

wholly into your hands, and am quite content with what you leave.' In this we see that Abraham's great wealth left him an unworldly heart. He was much more set on remaining in love and goodwill than on living where he could get richer. North or south, hill or valley, was all one to him so that he could live at peace and obey the leading of his Heavenly Friend.

10. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

Lot forgot what he owed to Abraham. He forgot the knowledge of Divine Truth, the promise of protection, the hope of blessedness to come. He was guided by earthly sight alone. He left him in whom all nations were to be blessed, and went to live among the accursed, just because of the rich returns of the fertile soil.

11. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. 12. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

Here is the holy household parted. Abraham remained on the hills of Canaan, without changing his life or plans. He was true to the Voice of his unseen Guide, loyalty to God was his first care. Lot meanwhile was wholly intent on the prospects which opened before him as he settled in the (then) rich valley. Abraham was now weakened in numbers, left more alone, he felt the desertion of one who had so far shared his hopes, yet he continued in the same line without altering.

13. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.

Such are Lot's new surroundings; perhaps he went there with the hope of doing some good. If so, he was much mistaken, for when he left Sodom he could not count one convert, one religious friend. Alas, how contagious is vice! Here it has spread throughout a whole community. Deadly sins were reckoned as trifles. No one feared offending God; no one noticed the terrible results of evil in the withering of all holy affections. Keep me, O God, from sharing such vileness. Let me by Thy all-powerful grace cherish a pure heart, wherever I go.

14. *And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: 15. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.*

He had lost a friend, but God would recompense him. He was shut out from rich lands, but not from heavenly blessings. This promise comes to us. We are Abraham's seed, and inherit, not the literal Canaan, but that which was figured by it—the blessings of God's Church now and of the heavenly Jerusalem hereafter. This look of faith which Abraham took reminds us of Moses' vision before his death. He too did not literally inherit the land, but obtained somewhat better and more lasting. What we crave is an Eternal Home; all things here below are disappointing.

16. *And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.*

Stars and sand could not equal the number of Abraham's descendants, and as yet he had no son. Scarcely any one in that ancient world shared his faith or hope, and yet now innumerable believers have learnt the lesson. It is Abraham's faith, Abraham's God, that has triumphed, and the false gods of the heathen that have vanished away. If we are grateful to those who have discovered truth and found out gains for humanity, here is a benefactor to whom we owe much.

17. *Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.*

'Walk through the land,' said the Voice, 'as its owner, look on it as thine through faith and trust; let faith triumph over sense.' Oh may this sure trust be mine! May I, as I go through this world, understand that it is wholly my God's, and therefore mine! I am His child, and therefore all things are ordered by Him for my good. Men are but instruments in His Hands, to work out those wise ends which He designs for my everlasting profit.

18. *Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.*

Here is a longer stay made; here is a third altar built; here is the true heir settling among strangers, and keeping to himself his

lofty destiny. I am somewhat reminded when I read these verses of the world's true Lord and King when He came at last to Bethlehem or to Nazareth and lived among his subjects, disguised in human infancy. There 'He was in the world, yet the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.'

CHAPTER XIV

1. The battle of four kings against five. 12. Lot is taken prisoner.
14. Abram rescueth him. 18. Melchizedek blesseth Abram.
20. Abram giveth him tithe. 22. The rest of the spoil, his partners having had their portions, he restoreth to the king of Sodom.

AND it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; 2. That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.

This chapter is a bit of ancient history let into the life of Abraham, and disclosing many details about the nations and events of that long-forgotten time. It is the first record we have of war, and of the confederation of princes. Here we see great oppressors exercising power and punishing disobedience. The great kingdoms of the East are already formed and begin to weigh down the free earth and enslave men. We know too well that war, which began so long ago, still rages, still devours. The coming of the Prince of Peace has not yet established the empire of peace on earth, but yet it has given promises and thoughts of peace.

3. All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea. 4. Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

Then their rich lands were coveted by enemies, had to pay tribute, were in danger of invasion. Abraham on his barren hills was safe from the troubles in which Lot found himself involved on the fertile plain. These five kings shook off their master's yoke and rejoiced for a while in their fancied freedom, yet all the while they were slaves to the worse despotism of sin; none of them made any effort to abolish that yoke.

5. *And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that were with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim, 6. And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto El-paran, which is by the wilderness. 7. And they returned, and came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezon-tamar.*

The confederate armies from the East went round the country east and south of Jordan, overthrowing and destroying the ancient inhabitants. Not their great height, nor their strength, nor their walled cities could protect them. All the country of Bashan, and that where the Ammonites and Moabites lived afterwards, and the desert valley down as far as the Red Sea, felt the blow. Then the invaders turned northward again and came up by the western side of the Dead Sea.

8. *And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar); and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim; 9. With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five.*

The kings of Sodom and its neighbourhood made a stand against their enemies. Now that danger was so near, they put aside the idle habits of that luxurious land and went forth to fight, but it was too late. Lot found himself amidst the terrors of the approaching foe and the cries and lamentations of the people. He must have regretted the peace he had on the hillside with Abraham's tent near his.

10. *And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain. 11. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way: 12. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.*

These pits of bitumen showed a danger underlying the land. On the day of the defeat they clogged the steps of the flying soldiers,

but they presaged a much greater disaster. They were a token of forces hid in the earth which might one day come to light and spread ruin around. Here all Lot's goods, on which he set so much store, are plundered, and he himself made captive. He has to leave his home with hopeless tears, not expecting any rescue, any helper.

13. *And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.* 14. *And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.*

Abraham heard this bad news, that his friend had been carried off into hopeless captivity. He might have said, 'How foolish of Lot to choose Sodom for a dwelling-place!' He might have lamented the calamity as being past mending. He might have folded his hands and regretted his own weakness in men and resources; but no, he did what he could, and did it at once. He gathered together his own household who shared with him the knowledge of a protecting Heavenly Father, encouraged them to fight, counselled them how to make the best of their small army; nor did he refuse the help of the three Amorites who were his neighbours. Thus Abraham's visions, hopes, religious communings had not robbed him of practical energy in this sudden crisis.

15. *And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.*

This was a night attack (like that of Gideon in Judges vii.), in which a few resolute men surprised and threw into confusion a great host. Thus the spoilers were overthrown and scattered, and the tears of the captives were turned to joy. But Abraham felt, as Melchizedek reminded him (v. 20), that it was to God, not to his own skill or courage, that he owed this unexpected victory.

16. *And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.*

We do not read that Abraham boasted of his achievement, or went on with his victorious soldiers to other fields of renown. Rather he

withdrew again into his peaceful and contemplative life, resolving that as little as possible of the profit or glory of the victory should be his. But Lot did not lay to heart the terrible lesson he had received; he rejoiced at recovering his freedom and his property, and went back to live in Sodom, just as he had lived before. No doubt he thanked Abraham warmly for the moment, but how much better it would have been had he left Sodom now and taken to Abraham's companionship, a sadder and a wiser man.

17. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale.

This 'king's dale,' where Abraham received congratulations on his victory, was no doubt the same place where Prince Absalom, long afterwards, erected a pillar to keep his own name in remembrance (2 Sam. xviii. 18); but in Absalom's case the pillar tells not of victory, but of defeat, of one who was defeated and ruined by his own ambition, his own passion, his own wickedness. Abraham, on the contrary, came there as conqueror, and not only over his enemies, but over covetousness and pride also.

18. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the Most High God.

Here is a Priest of the Most High God long before Aaron's Priesthood was thought of. Here is a king of Peace, a king of Righteousness, who comes forth from a heathen world to bless Abraham in God's Name. If the Bread and Wine which Melchizedek brought forth was his offering to God, we are reminded of the Christian offering of Bread and Wine presented in memory of Christ's Death. If it served also to refresh Abraham and his army, we learn of that same Sacrament as designed to strengthen and refresh our souls. But to profit by that heavenly food, we too must resemble Abraham, must be good soldiers, winning victories over evil.

19. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth: 20. And blessed be the Most High God Which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.

Here are blessings bestowed on man, and also sent up to God. Abraham, in whom all nations are blessed, bows down humbly to receive a blessing from one who spoke on God's behalf and as a figure of the coming Redeemer. He acknowledged that his

victory was due not to his own prudence or courage, but to Divine Love and Might. He recognised how constant had been God's protecting care over him. He gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoil to express these thoughts by an actual offering. Oh may we, like Abraham, join courage in the hour of danger with gratitude and bounty in our prosperity! God still blesses us, still seeks a blessing from us—nay, His poor and His Church plead on His behalf.

21. *And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.*

The King of Sodom expected to get back nothing but the captives rescued, nay, he considered them too as Abraham's property, which he had rights over, and could transfer, if he pleased, back to the king. The wealth he was sure Abraham meant to keep. He judged Abraham by himself, and could not imagine he had won the victory with disinterested aims. But what this king said blindly, God says to us designedly. God asks us for souls. He values persons and despises gold. Offer to God what He requires most,—souls converted, hearts strengthened in good, persons rescued from Satan's slavery. He cares more for this than for gifts of costly jewels or gold.

22. *And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the Most High God, the Possessor of heaven and earth,* 23. *That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich :*

Abraham's solemn adjuration, his wholesome pride and independence, remind us of his great descendant St. Paul, who went through the world winning victories, storming strongholds, bringing hearts under Christ's yoke, and yet refused to take any payment for his work. This was his boast, his joy, as it had been the Patriarch's. How wise was Abraham not to put himself under any obligation to the King of Sodom. He knew too well how great was the corruption of that sovereign and his people. Abraham would fight for them, would set them free, but he could never accept gifts at their hands.

24. *Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Ener, Eshcol, and Mamre ; let them take their portion.*

Abraham was just and grateful to his servants and his allies. These Canaanites who had come forward to help him, had fought and

conquered by his side, were not sharers in his faith or in the inheritance of promise; but he was scrupulously just, and did not forget their temporal reward. Let us, when we have to do with heathens or unbelievers, recommend our faith to them by careful attention to all duties, by showing them that true religion brings with it trustworthiness and fairness. What keeps heathen back from the Gospel is, most of all, the evil treatment which Christians bestow on them. Thus Abraham's public appearance and warlike demeanour are over, and he returns again to meditate on God's dealings and mysterious promises.

CHAPTER XV

1. God encourageth Abram. 2. Abram complaineth for want of an heir.
4. God promiseth him a son, and a multiplying of his seed.
6. Abram is justified by faith. 7. Canaan is promised again, and confirmed by a sign, 12. and a vision.

AFTER *these things the Word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram : I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*

Abraham had provoked the wrath of mighty kings by his rescue of Lot; but he need not fear, for God was his shield. He had renounced all the spoils of his victory and so missed the chance of greatly enriching himself; but he had not really been a loser, for God was his reward. God's servants fear Him most, seek Him most. He is their living Dread, their lifelong Friend, and so this world's dazzling glories do not wholly fascinate them.

2. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? 3. And Abram said, Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed: and lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

How should the promised blessing come? Devout souls longed for the repairer of fallen humanity, for a blessing to replace the curse—and it had been told to Abraham that this Restorer should spring from his family. Do not suppose that he merely longed for a natural heir; no, his hopes were greater, his prospect wider than that. He grieved to think that he himself should not be the stem from which the seed of promise should spring.

4. *And behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.*

God's promise is sure, though human expectation fails. His word to Abraham came true; let us not put less confidence in Him now. He who blessed Abraham's bed, so that there came from him one who should inherit and transmit the promise, is still mighty to protect those who are in danger, to restore what seems altogether fallen, to fulfil promises that seem to us inconceivable. Let us bring our anxieties to that Divine Friend and be at rest.

5. *And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be.*

These innumerable stars, which bewilder our sight or overpass our keenest instruments, are all known to their Creator. Their formation, their order, their movements are all appointed by Him. They each have their place wherein to serve Him. So with the countless multitude of His elect. Man may ignore or misjudge them, but they shine and move in the sight of God. Remember 'they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars'; that is a worthier object for which to live than the foundation of kingdoms or of fortunes. That glory is made up of the gratitude of rescued souls.

6. *And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.*

Like Abraham, rest on God. Commit all things to His wise ordering. Let your own vileness, folly, distrust, be lost in the might of Divine Grace. Expect righteousness and peace with a trustful heart, yet not for your own worthiness, but only as being a member of Christ—a lamb of His flock. Lord, I will trust Thee, for none else in earth or heaven can claim my full trust. I will expect from Thee alone all that my soul needs. Thy gift of Christ means all other gifts. I rest not on my own changeful feelings, but on Thy sure Word.

7. *And He said unto him, I am the Lord, that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.*

So it was said afterwards: 'I am the Lord thy God, Who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' So God desires us still to represent to Him His mercies whereby He has redeemed and blest us, as grounds for further hopes. All

things come of Thee, O Lord, and we but repay Thee Thine own when we give back thanks and praise. It was not Abraham who sought for and found God so much as God Who found him. For us also His plans are sure, reach far, and root deep. He is our Eternal Friend.

8. *And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?*

This question is like Mary's to the Angel, 'How shall this be?' It implies not disbelief, but a reverent inquiry. Like her, too, Abraham pondered over God's promises, desired to know more of the coming salvation. Abraham's whole heart was set on the future. The present was to him of little importance. He longed to realise, to appropriate, to prepare for things which lay far beyond his own span of mortal life.

9. *And He said unto him, Take Me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.* 10. *And he took unto Him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.*

These are the five clean sacrificial animals which were to be used in the Jewish sacrifices, and they are slain and divided according to the universal custom of the ancient world in making a solemn contract. The sacrifices were offered, slain and divided, and the contracting parties passed between them, and this signified that death should be the penalty of breaking the promise made. But in all this ceremony I observe a figure of the Mosaic Law to come, its sacrifices, its contract between God and His people, its coming in after and beside the promises once made to Faith. God here seems to represent the whole method of His dealing with His ancient people by figures and shadows.

11. *And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*

These sacrifices were but the carcasses of slain beasts. How different is our case, who enjoy a covenant won by the precious offering of Christ Himself once made, and confirmed afresh to us by the spiritual renewal of that offering at each Eucharist! Yet Abraham cherished and watched over his sacrifices as being pledges and tokens of some great good.

12. *And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram ; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.*

God puts the present out of sight, that we may look onward into the future. Darkness hides our sight, but yet He sends an inward light. The troubles of his posterity unrolled themselves before Abraham's eye. He passed with them into the black shadow of Egyptian captivity, and yet discerned an exit from it. But, alas ! many of his seed, when the true Deliverer came at last, remained in their darkness, in their spiritual sleep, and would not let Him rouse them.

13. *And He said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them ; and they shall afflict them four hundred years ;*

14. *And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge : and afterward shall they come out with great substance.*

Here is the history of the Exodus told long beforehand. It was this revelation which father handed over to son, repeating 'God shall surely visit you.' Will there not be vouchsafed to God's ancient people another and better deliverance, the discovery of a richer treasure, the entry on a truer Canaan ? During the long captivity in Egypt, their God did not forsake them, though He hid His face for a while. His gifts and His calling are 'without repentance.'

15. *And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace ; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.*

'In peace.' So may I die. May I be laid in the grave at peace with God and with men ; not unwilling to go ; not cherishing any bitter memories, any discontent ; ready to commit my soul into my Creator's merciful Hands. If I die in old age, I am thankful to Him for granting me a full and perfect life. Oh that I had used it better ! But if my end is premature, yet He can supply defects, ripen what is cut off suddenly.

16. *But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again : for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.*

O great mercies and great judgments of God ! He waits patiently both in love and in wrath. His rich promises, His awful judgments, are long in maturing. Let me so live as not to call down His judgment on my iniquities. As for the past, I know that His mercy revealed in Christ Jesus is fuller and deeper than all my transgressions. If I had my deserts, I could look for nothing but wrath ; only I trust Him to pardon me.

17. *And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.*

So amidst the darkness of the Law God appeared on Mount Sinai with cloud and flame, and entered into a covenant with the Jewish people. That manifestation had darkness mingled with light, some bright flashes only, but the rest obscure. God passed between the pieces of the slain animals, after the fashion of men in those days when they made a solemn covenant, that He might bring home to Abraham's mind the absolute certainty of what was promised. Let me learn to lean on God's truth and promises now. Let me be persuaded that what He says will be surely done.

18. *In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:* 19. *The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites,* 20. *And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims,* 21. *And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgasites, and the Jebusites.*

This was the earthly Canaan, then possessed by these ten nations, and out of which the Israelites were to expel them. On the hills of this land God's people were to dwell,

‘Where Abraham fed his flock of yore,
Among their fathers' tombs.’

Here was to be raised up a nation of pure and upright servants of the Most High. But observe two things. One is, they had to fight and conquer in order to carry out the promise; it did not come to pass without their own co-operation. And another, the Jews by their sins diminished the promise, missed a good deal of it, and finally lost it. All God's gifts imply that we do our part and are steadfast.

CHAPTER XVI

1. Sarai, being barren, giveth Hagar to Abram. 4. Hagar, being afflicted for despising her mistress, runneth away. 7. An angel sendeth her back to submit herself, 11. and telleth her of her child. 15. Ishmael is born.

NOW Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. 2. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the

Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

Sarai desired that the promises should come true, but would not wait for God to fulfil them. She desired that Abraham should gain in his posterity the promised honours and blessings; therefore she, in her impatience, introduced into the holy household the custom of polygamy, lawful indeed in the ancient world, yet which brought with it endless misery, strife, and degradation. All this, however, was overruled by God to the fulfilment of His wise plans and the prefiguring of things to come.

3. *And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.*

Sarai seems almost to appear like Eve in Paradise, choosing to leave faith's ways, as wearied of them, and persuading her husband to join with her. Ten years had now passed since Abraham's arrival in the land. Ten years with many mercies, and yet dangers and divisions also; and still there was no prospect of that son on whom such high hopes were to centre. The question was, could the household of believers keep steadfast to that which is, after all, nature's plan and God's plan, the union of one husband with one wife?

4. *And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.*

Hagar thought she might take her mistress's place. She despised her and forgot her own servile condition. St. Paul sees in Hagar a type of the Jewish synagogue living in bondage to the ceremonial law, and despising those whom God had set free through Christ. He bids us remember that the Church of God, our spiritual mother, is free and has brought us forth in the condition of God's children, having liberty of heart and grace to draw near to Him.

5. *And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee.* 6. *But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.*

Sarai's plan had brought trouble into her household, and she requited it on the offender. She appealed to God's judgment

and claimed her rights as the Patriarch's wife, and he bade her exercise her authority and vindicate herself from Hagar's contempt, for so right and justice required. Then God allowed among His servants polygamy and slave-owning with their consequent evils? Yes, for so the customs and needs of those ancient days required; but He would not have us go backward to such practices now, but rather go forward always in seeking all that is good and casting off evil.

7. *And the Angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.*
 8. *And He said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.*

Here, for the first time in Scripture, God sends His Angel, speaks by an Angel. The time of the covenant which was 'ordained through angels' has now come. God was pleased to employ the ministry of blessed spirits, through whom He spoke, who represented Him. His compassion was thus manifested. He showed that He cared for the suffering and forsaken. Now that God has been manifested to me in Jesus Christ, I am content with that manifestation and need no created mediator.

9. *And the Angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.*

Abraham's house and a servant's place there are better than the heathen world; submission and patience better than a flight to Egypt. God often inculcates this lesson; it was the first He taught when He came visibly on earth,

'Soon He sorrowed, soon He suffered,
 We must meek and gentle be.'

If He is our Father, then to submit patiently to Him when He afflicts us will bring joy at last.

10. *And the Angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.*

Hagar now belonged to the household of faith. She had her own share in the promises. Her posterity were to be the great Arab race whose conquests and great works should be known in every land. She was to forget her present troubles in the thought of a great future which lay before her children.

11. *And the Angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael ; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction.* 12. *And he will be a wild man ; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him ; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.*

Here is foretold the freedom of the Arab race, their independence of civilised life, their constant warfare, their invincible bravery. But, besides this literal fulfilment of the prediction, St. Paul would have us see in Hagar's posterity the unconverted Jews who refused to accept the promise when it came, but remained separate, and would not form one society with the Gentile believers. They stood out for their privileges being confined to themselves alone, and so forfeited them. Yet they remain on from age to age as a wonder and a sign.

13. *And she called the Name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me : for she said, Have I also here looked after Him that seeth me ?*

He saw me when I thought not of Him. He thought of me when I had forgotten Him. He was attentive to my case when I seemed forsaken of all. Let this salutary verse remain in our memories for our comfort in lonely hours, for our restraint when tempted. No, God sees me, I will not faint or fall.

14. *Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi ; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.*

Hagar had learnt in Abraham's family to mark mercies by thankful commemoration. This well was turned for her into a sanctuary where she worshipped God as the All-seeing One. She learnt about the Living God, One able to hear prayer, Who cares for His servants, with Whom they can enter into intimate communion. Such is our God, and every church is a token to remind us that He is near.

15. *And Hagar bare Abram a son : and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael.* 16. *And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.*

Thus Abraham's son was born, but not yet the child of promise. Ishmael and his descendants had their own task in the world. Their persevering national life, their strong hold upon the doctrine

of the unity of God, these distinguished them from age to age. But it was to Isaac that the hope of a Divine Mediator was committed ; to his family alone were made known the types and figures of salvation.

CHAPTER XVII

1. God reneweth the covenant. 5. Abram his name is changed in token of a greater blessing. 10. Circumcision is instituted. 15. Sarah her name is changed, and she blessed. 17. Isaac is promised. 23. Abraham and Ishmael are circumcised.

AND *when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God ; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.*

O God Almighty, Who hast power to overcome nature and quicken the dead, I beseech Thee let not my cold, dull, lifeless heart remain as it is, but let it put forth new life and become a source of good to others also ! Thou didst bid Abraham walk in Thy Presence, and be perfect. Long ago he had left his own country at Thy call, next he learnt confidence in Thy all-powerful protection (xv. 1), here he learnt to devote himself entirely to Thy love and service. By these successive steps, of separation from the world, of confidence, and of love, many souls have passed towards heaven.

2. And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

How good is God to enter into covenant with man ! Man alone of creatures is made in God's Image, with a capacity to enter into communion with the Eternal, to acknowledge mercies with gratitude, to receive and obey Divine commands. Let me never forget or despise the mercies which God has bestowed on me. His covenant with me in Christ implies greater blessings than I can comprehend as yet.

3. And Abram fell on his face : and God talked with him, saying, 4. As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

Keep me, Lord, from an irreverent and distracted mind. Let me, like the father of the faithful, adore Thee with due reverence. If

Abraham, God's friend, behaved with such humble adoration, ought not our worship to be carefully ordered and exactly paid? It is not true friendship with God but a base pretext and sham that would assume a garb of familiarity and degrade religion by foolish, boastful words. In prayer I address my awful and eternal Lord, on Whom I entirely depend, to Whom I owe all, Who is ever present with me though unseen. How should I behave most suitably to such a Presence?

5. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

On this great occasion a new name is given, or the old one is altered, to be a token of new hopes and new life. So Saul became Paul (Act xiii. 9) when the prospect of Gentile converts without number began to open upon him. He too was to be a spiritual father of many nations. Abraham's promised children are not only the Jews, but all believers in Christ. Many multitudes of believing hearts look to him as their father, recognise his faith as the source from which theirs has flowed.

6. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

From the Patriarch's lonely tent nations should grow, from that small company of strangers mighty princes. So from a little spark of faith, a single movement of grace, come great results in homes and hearts. Let us but do our little piece of work in our day in full reliance on the Almighty, Who is able to prosper it beyond all our hopes.

7. And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

8. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

God, Who hast made such a covenant with Thy servant in old days, grant me a share, not in the letter, but in the inner meaning and spirit of this covenant. I am of Abraham's family by spiritual affinity, not natural. I look for a country that this world knows not of. I know that Thy promises are not limited to this world's narrow scene. After all my wanderings let me find Thy home ready for me.

9. *And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep My covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.* 10. *This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee ; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.* 11. *And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin ; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you.*

This is the outward and visible sign of the Covenant. It set forth two truths, one the impurity of our fallen nature, and a second the power of God to remedy that impurity. It was no sacrament in the strict sense of the word, but a witness to man's sense of sinfulness and his need of a Divine cleansing. I must not think that there was any virtue in it to pardon sin or confer new life. No, that could not come till Christ Himself shed His Blood. Jews were circumcised to declare their membership in that nation which looked for Redemption, and to signify lessons of self-restraint and purity. Holy Baptism is for me all and much more than all that circumcision was to Jews.

12. *And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.* 13. *He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised : and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.*

God puts son and slave on the same level here. Both alike shared in that rite which declared them members of God's family. The purpose of this Divine order was to raise the slave by incorporating him with his master's family in their worship. Thus he might learn with them to obey God's Law and look for His promised salvation. Sharers of a common covenant, a common hope, would not these privileges tend to mitigate a slave's lot and lead towards his enfranchisement in due time ?

14. *And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people ; he hath broken My covenant.*

This was the penalty on wilful disobedience to God's Law : Divine Judgment should find out the offender. It is a precise and clear rule which is here imposed, and yet St. Paul, under Divine guidance, declares that circumcision 'availed nothing,' and that the necessity for it has been removed. He allowed of it as a thing indifferent, but fought successfully to free us from its obligation as

a rule. This remarkable alteration in God's precepts shows us how His Word changes from time to time according to man's changing needs, and that the time may come for certain rules or ceremonies to be laid aside which were once approved or even commanded. Oh for the Spirit's guidance to see our way between old and new, to distinguish what is essential and permanent from what is transitory!

15. *And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.* 16. *And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.*

If Sarai's name is altered to Sarah, meaning 'princess'; and this in token of her honour as the mother of the son of promise, who came, long waited for, to vindicate God's faithfulness, shall not we find typified here a holier mother and a better offspring? What is Sarah's honour and dignity compared with that which Mary obtained as the Virgin Mother of the Divine Redeemer? What is the royal dignity of Judah compared with Christ's sway over true hearts in every age?

17. *Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?* 18. *And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before Thee!*

This was 'good tidings of great joy' to Abraham, to hear of the near fulfilment of his hopes. So good, so great news he dared not fully believe, and therefore pleaded again for his son Ishmael, as having obtained in his birth all that he dared to ask. Yet Abraham does not doubt God's power or goodness; he had had long experience of both. All that he felt was his own nothingness, his own unworthiness of Divine favours. And this temper of his God largely blest and recompensed.

19. *And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.*

To Isaac was to be limited the covenant promise, the prospect of a future blessing for mankind, the possession of God's Truth and

worship ; was not this the best treasure of all ? God is pleased to enter into covenant with man. Thus He uplifts our frailty, gives permanence to our transitoriness. The great God of heaven and earth makes a covenant with me, bids me depend on Him, look up to Him. Thus I learn to live for higher ends than mere nature tells of.

20. And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee : Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly ; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. 21. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

Ishmael was to have power, leave twelve sons who should be mighty chiefs, be the ancestor of a warlike people. Meanwhile, Isaac's family were strangers and sojourners, had a long time of bondage to pass through ; far more appearance, for many hundred years, of God's blessing being with the former than with the latter. Nay, if we regard the Mohammedan nations as the descendants of Ishmael, their power and empire have lasted on till now over the fairest portion of the earth. But God has for His servants something better. He is their God now and for ever. He is better than richest gifts or greatest names.

22. And He left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

Then God had descended to speak with him. God Whose dwelling is above, Who had not been manifested to earthly sight since man's fall, had yet chosen Abraham to be His friend, with whom He should hold communion. How great an honour for our mortal nature ! What purity of heart and life befitted him with whom God held intercourse ! But yet God is present with us now in a closer manner still. By His Holy Sacrament He tarries among men, by His Holy Spirit He enters into our hearts. O Lord, abide there ; we pray Thee, leave us not !

23. And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house ; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.

Lord, circumcise our hearts, that we may love Thee more than self ; our imaginations, that we may put away idle fancies ; our ears,

that we may hear and understand Thy truth ; our lips, that we may speak the right word in its season. Do Thou work in us that purity and obedience which this rite of the old law signified.

24. And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26. In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. 27. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.

This household was united by a common faith. The God of Abraham was known to and worshipped by all Abraham's family. God's commands were obeyed, His promises trusted, by all alike. Abraham and his household lived and worked together, shared the dangers of the desert, the toils of the flock. No thought of pride on his part, or of slavish falsehood or recklessness on theirs, separated master and slave. In the world, as it then was, these slaves were happy who were born or bought into that holy household.

CHAPTER XVIII

1. Abraham entertaineth three angels. 9. Sarah is reprov'd for laughing at the strange promise. 17. The destruction of Sodom is revealed to Abraham. 23. Abraham maketh intercession for the men thereof.

AND *the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre : and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day ;*

God's promises are in themselves certain, yet He chooses our willing obedience, our performance of duty, as means whereby to carry them out. Abraham sat looking out for travellers, desirous to exercise hospitality, and thereby he 'entertained angels un-awares' and received the announcement that his hopes were near fulfilment. Let me be equally ready to show kindness to all, and especially prompt to honour and succour Christ in His suffering members.

2. *And he lift up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,*

In these three wayfarers whom Abraham discerned, greeted, entertained, God was present, God was manifested. Abraham desired to show honour to human guests, but the attention was received by those who were more than man. That great God, of Himself invisible to man, Who was manifested to Moses in the unconsuming fire or the transitory glory, Whom the Prophets beheld as a majestic King, was pleased to put His Name on these three Angels, so that they spoke as from God; listened, promised, warned with Divine power and mercy. How shall I apprehend this great mystery of God's manifestation by angelic messengers? It is certain that mortal eyes cannot see God, and yet He has taken visible form and conversed with men; He has shown Himself accessible to our prayers and tears. These visions were anticipations of the Holy Incarnation, whereby He marvellously took to Himself a dwelling-place in our humanity, never to quit it. Oh may I have eyes to discern His Presence, and behave accordingly!

3. *And said, My lord, if now I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant:* 4. *Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:* 5. *And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.*

Abraham makes light of his offers and himself. Having much wealth and many servants, he yet takes on himself the entire care of the guests—he will not put off this sacred duty on any one else—he regards it as a special providence of God that has given him the chance of being hospitable. Break up, Lord, my selfishness, that I may recall the many who lack those comforts and advantages which Thou hast freely placed at my door; let me be ready to show them any kindness that is in my power.

6. *And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth.* 7. *And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it.*

Sarah was to share in this gracious task of hospitality. She did not pride herself on her dignity, but acted as the ancestress of Him

Who 'came not to be ministered unto but to minister.' Abraham's family had learnt from him how to care for guests; all were anxious to do their part. Thus by exercising bounty to men they received it again from on high; thus they drew down new favours from their gracious God. This is the way to prevail with God; we must show bounty and mercy, thus our prayer will find wings to soar.

8. *And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.*

In this scene of grace and kindness, Divine messengers visible on earth and sharing earthly food, while Abraham stands by reverently, as already discerning who his guests are, I see prefigured that astonishing condescension whereby God's Son sojourned with us, man with man, for thirty-three years, and with which He instituted a holy meal as an abiding memorial of His work, and a means to strengthen and refresh us wayfarers.

9. *And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.* 10. *And He said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.*

For this the heavenly visitors had come, to repeat the promise of an heir to Abraham, to tell him that its fulfilment was near, to awaken in his and Sarah's hearts faith to accept the gift which God designed for them. It was thus that God sent messengers to Zacharias and to the Blessed Virgin herself to tell them that they were in the immediate path of great Divine dispensations, and bid them behave accordingly. There too was a difference, Mary believed and obeyed at once, so did Abraham; with Zacharias and with Sarah doubt came before faith.

11. *Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.* 12. *Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?*

This laugh of Sarah's, invisible to men, was yet perceived and known by the Angels; they knew that she disbelieved their message. Hers is not a question like Mary's (St. Luke i. 34), as to the manner in which God will bring about this work; but rather like that of Zacharias (St. Luke i. 18), an expression of disbelief in a thing as naturally impossible. Let me rather fix my

faith on God's Word than on the apparent permanence of nature. All that looks so fixed, so settled, or unchanging in nature is yet at His service and constructed to do His will; what He says will come true.

13. *And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?*

14. *Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.*

God would return, not in any visible form, but by the operation of His power, He would return to do what He had promised; then all the long years of waiting would issue in a joyful fulfilment. His purpose was to create in Abraham, the father of the faithful, a character of entire reliance on the Unseen. All these long years of waiting were not thrown away, in that they brought Abraham to live on the promises of his Divine Friend. Is not Abraham's God our God? Has He not for us too dispensations of mercy that take long to unfold and require from us a patient, dutiful heart?

15. *Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.*

It would seem that these words of grave reproof brought her to share her husband's faith, and that she now 'judged Him faithful Who promised'; she learned that God can trace our secret thoughts, our half-expressed emotions; all things are plain to His eyes. When I read this account of God's homely intercourse with Abraham and Sarah by angelic messengers, when I read this familiar colloquy of the Divine with man, I contrast it with the next step in man's spiritual education. When the time came for God's dread Law to be given, Moses was bidden not to 'draw nigh,' he 'exceedingly feared and quaked' in the Divine Presence; all things then reminded man that he was unworthy to stand before God. That too was a needful lesson, and came in its due place.

16. *And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.*

Abraham went with them in order to fulfil his hospitable duties, and also desiring to penetrate the dread sentence with which he perceived his guests to be laden. He observed great anger and awe in their faces as they looked towards Sodom, and he feared for his friend who was still abiding there. He hoped to be able to intercede for those in danger.

17. *And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do ;*

This is like an anticipation of Gospel grace. Christ the Lord says, 'Henceforth I call you not servants but friends—for all things which I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you.' Here we see that Abraham had been indeed admitted to friendship with God. Here we see what is meant by the title 'Abraham's God.' Now that same God is our God ; do we keep our hearts so pure, so calm, so watchful, as to be fit to hold communion with our Father, and receive His gracious messages ?

18. *Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him ?* 19. *For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment ; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him.*

God, Who had chosen Abraham, regards him not in himself, but in the community of believers which was to spring from him. Abraham was the founder of true religion in the world. He provided for its transmission by instituting worship and instruction. Those whom God had given him became a church bound together by common faith and duty. O great mercy of God, whereby religion, immortal hope, loving obedience to an Unseen Guide, have been planted and continued among men !

20. *And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous ;*

Then grievous sin causes a great cry to go up to the care of God. Men, indeed, are deaf to this awful cry, but the Divine Judge hears and heeds. Let me remember for my comfort that if my sins have cried thus loudly for vengeance, yet the Blood of Christ speaks better things, pleads for mercy as loudly. Even if my sins have been very grievous, against light, against truth, in contempt of mercy, yet I know that my Judge is my Saviour too.

21. *I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me ; and if not, I will know.*

In this verse God seems to come down to my level and speak as a man, to teach me a salutary lesson. He would not Himself give sentence till He had seen as well as heard. He would look into things for Himself with extreme patience and forbearance. Oh

may I suppress that spirit of hasty judgment, hasty condemnation, which has so much sway over me! I would resolve never to blame without grave cause, or to decide until I really know the truth.

22. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord.

Then the Avengers went on their way and drew near to the doomed city, and yet all things went on there as usual; vice and luxury were not abated; no outward signs pointed to the last hour of trial passing away and the time of vengeance coming near. Only one of the three Angels, who represented God and bore His Name, remained to receive Abraham's prayers and give them an answer from God. In this Angel, Who is called 'the Lord,' and speaks as God, am I right in recognising my Divine Lord and Saviour, as yet unincarnate? Is all this manifestation a foreshadowing of His closer intercourse with us?

23. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24. Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt Thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? 25. That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

The doctrine of the Divine Justice has firm hold on Abraham's soul—he is surely persuaded that God is the Judge of all the earth, and is a righteous Judge, distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked. This is the foundation truth on which to rest when all the world seems to totter; God is the Judge, and He is righteous. I may be certain of His justice, though all the world lie in confusion. This was Abraham's faith, and it is still that of God's people. Indeed, the terrible inequalities of life contend with it, but faith looks forward to the eternal judgment, and perseveres in her confession. O Lord, I know that Thou art righteous, and that no deed will fail to find its recompense with Thee!

26. And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

Glory be to Thee, O Lord, for Thy mercy! How unrecognised are the humble services of the good! we know not how many great states, great glories, great undertakings, subsist by virtue of God's

regard for His true servants, hidden, and perhaps despised, as they are. Do not think that the world's glories

'Stand by their own unshaken might.'

Oh no! God's forbearance, the prayers of saints, the humble virtues of the good, have more to do with it.

27. *And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: 28. Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt Thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And He said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. 29. And he spake unto Him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And He said, I will not do it for forty's sake.*

Prayer grows and perseveres, and still wins a favouring answer. Abraham reminds us of those New Testament parables which speak of persevering in prayer, of that friend who won the loaves by his importunity (Luke xi. 5), or that poor widow whose cries wearied the unjust judge into attending to her case (Luke xviii. 5). Prayer does not presume, but recognises man's frailty, man's nothingness; it confesses that we are indeed miserable, poor, blind, naked; but, just because of this, it flies to God for what we need: relying not on any worthiness of our own, but on His unbounded mercy.

30. *And he said unto Him, O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And He said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.*

Abraham gets bolder here, and deducts ten; his fear of the approaching judgment and his sense of God's wonderful goodness both growing keener. Christians in such circumstances have One Who presents their prayers, One for Whose merits they claim to be heard. In this history I notice God's goodness: how ready He is to spare, how patient in attending to the cries of one earnest heart. He Himself suggests to us those requests to which He graciously listens.

31. *And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. 32. And he said, O let not the Lord be angry, and I will*

Speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

This is the farthest point to which intercession dared to go. And let us not think that it was wasted, even though not ten righteous could be found. It was for Abraham's sake that Lot and his daughters were spared (xix. 29). There runs throughout this six times repeated intercession a deep sense of God's mercy as well as of His justice, also a sense of the worth of a righteous soul, also a conviction of the value of prayer: we conclude that it is indeed worth while to pray. Here in their earliest rudiments great questions are stirred belonging to God's government; a devout soul is seen pleading with God's justice, relying on His mercy, venturing into the great conflict between good and evil to rescue some souls that are in peril.

33. And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

God brought this interview to an end, and Abraham retired full of sad thoughts. He thought of the frightful judgment that hung over the guilty city. He feared for his friends who were entangled in it. No doubt he shared with his family the expectation and the warning; no doubt he drew out for them the lesson that deadly lusts indulged ruin the soul and provoke God to destroy the sinner. Abraham 'returned to his place,' far different indeed from that place which Lot had chosen; it was indeed more humble and poorer, but it was safe—purity and peace were there.

CHAPTER XIX

1. Lot entertaineth two angels. 4. The vicious Sodomites are stricken with blindness. 12. Lot is sent for safety into the mountains. 18. He obtaineth leave to go into Zoar. 24. Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed. 26. Lot's wife is a pillar of salt. 30. Lot dwelleth in a cave. 31. The incestuous original of Moab and Ammon.

AND *there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;*

Lot had done foolishly in settling at Sodom at all, knowing as he did what kind of character it bore; he had had a sharp and sudden warning in being despoiled and taken captive. But he had gone

back thither again, invited by the rich ground and the prospect of wealth. Indeed it 'vexed his righteous soul' to live with such people, yet he continued to do so, neither had he been able to win any one to better ways.

2. *And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.* 3. *And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.*

Lot had learnt from Abraham to be hospitable to strangers; he desired to protect them from insult, he waited on their needs and rejoiced to serve them; indeed, like the two disciples at Emmaus with their risen Lord (Luke xxiv. 29), he had to 'constrain' them before they would accept his hospitality. He offered them his best care, his best gifts, and they repaid him with deliverance in the impending judgment.

4. *But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter:* 5. *And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.*

We are shocked to read of this widespread, deadly, unnatural vice; but let us rather take warning lest we ourselves by compliance with the desires of the flesh fall under its dominion, and so be led on into deadly downfalls. It is too true that in hearts where unclean desire rules, all pure and tender affections fade away, the heart itself becomes flesh, there is no longer any room for faith, for compassion, for reverence. Oh that those who have learnt their own frailty by sad experience would rise and burst their chain, before it becomes too strong!

6. *And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him,* 7. *And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly.*

Lot had courage, then, and could speak his mind. But if he had done so at other times, if he had realised before this that these

sinner were indeed his brethren, and claimed of him some instruction, some reclamation, he would not have been left so utterly alone on the side of good. Still his courage and self-sacrifice are good to notice.

8. *Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.*

Was he right in this offer? Surely not. It marks, indeed, his intense regard for the sacred rites of hospitality that he would sacrifice his own children to avert evil from his guests; but it is never right to try and avoid one sin by allowing another. Far better for us to take our stand on God's Law and trust in Him to protect us. Abraham would never have recommended such a plan as this. It would never have been thought of in a household where God was truly served.

9. *And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door.*

When you read of the brutality and violence of the people of Sodom, remember that Christ the Lord said that if His mighty works had been done in Sodom it would have been brought to repentance and saved from destruction; or again, that the cities which wilfully rejected His disciples' message would have a heavier judgment than Sodom had. It is too true that many sinners whose vices I abhor, whose brutality I despise, have never had my chances of seeing God's marvels or hearing His gracious word. How little were their opportunities compared with mine!

10. *But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door.* 11. *And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great; so that they wearied themselves to find the door.*

This does not mean total blindness, for they gradually dispersed and found their way home; all was quiet when Lot went out later in the night. It would seem rather to mean a confusion and bewilderment which hindered them from carrying out their vile threats. God intervened to protect Lot, who trusted in Him. Though not naturally courageous, Lot gained courage by having angels on his side.

12. *And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place:* 13. *For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.*

This was in the night, when all was now peaceful and at rest. No signs were there that this was the last night of Sodom's existence. Feasting, no doubt, and strife and business had gone on as usual, and yet the last sands in the glass were running out. I wonder whether, when the Day of Judgment comes, it will come on an astonished world as swiftly, as suddenly, as that judgment came in old days.

14. *And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law.*

Such is mostly the case with those who preach God's approaching judgments. So it was with Noah as the Flood drew near. Things had gone on so long they seemed sure to go on still. What change was there that night in the heaven or on the earth that men should expect a catastrophe so near? Those who went by their senses alone found words about God's wrath and their own approaching ruin tedious to hear and impossible to believe.

15. *And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.* 16. *And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.*

O hard parting! Lot had settled there in order to grow rich peaceably, and he had seen all things prosper with him. Once he had lost all, even his liberty, and that and all else had been recovered through Abraham's courage; and now he had suddenly and irrevocably to part with all past any chance of recovery. Thanks be to God even for that salutary violence whereby He rescues us from the Sodom of this world, whereby He warns us, even sharply and painfully, that this is a perishing world, and that we must

set our hopes on an abiding city. When Thy warning comes, give us, Lord, ears to listen to it.

17. *And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that He said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.*

'Haste, for thy life escape, nor look behind!'

Here is a grave warning—leave all else and think only of life. Let me hear and repeat this warning when it concerns not life in this world but my hold on everlasting peace. There are times when I have to rise up at once and leave pleasant or gainful things if I would save my true self—times when I must escape from the world's torrent lest I be swallowed up and lost in it. On the mountain I shall be safe; let me not rest till my foot is firmly rooted there.

18. *And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord:*
19. *Behold now, Thy servant hath found grace in Thy sight, and Thou hast magnified Thy mercy, which Thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die:* 20. *Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.*

How weak is Lot's faith! He dares not trust to the Divine promise of safety, if he has to cross the wide plain before he can be secure. But yet he believed enough to know that ruin was near. The dawn brightened, and the sun was just about to rise; all things looked beautiful and at peace; the lovely land was 'like the garden of the Lord'; and yet the hour had come for its being laid desolate. So, too, one day will all this great and wonderful world pass away; but believing souls will have found a Zoar in which to be safe.

21. *And He said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken.*

Here is a gracious answer, like what Abraham obtained to his intercession. Here we see that Lot must have kept up his prayers, though he lived in Sodom. God was wont to hear and answer him. He prayed 'not trusting in his own righteousness, but in God's manifold and great mercy,' and so was heard. Who in Zoar thought of the true cause of its escaping from the near and manifest ruin of all its neighbour cities?

22. *Haste thee, escape thither ; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.*

God seems to tie His own hands. He Who is Almighty says : ' I cannot do anything '—all waits upon Lot's speed in gaining a refuge. So in Ezekiel ix., so in Revelation vii., God's avenging judgments wait until His true servants are marked or sealed with His sign. We must never suppose that He forgets any one soul that trusts in Him. He Who governs His universe by general laws is yet attentive to the cry of each of us.

23. *The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.* 24. *Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven ;* 25. *And He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.*

Here is a rehearsal of that Great Day to come, when men shall say, ' Peace and safety,' while ' sudden destruction cometh upon them.' Here are all things that seemed so beautiful and so permanent swallowed up in a deluge of fire, just as the great world itself shall one day be burned up. As to the natural causes of this catastrophe, I am told little ; in what way God convulsed the earth, or called forth the slumbering fires that lie beneath its surface, or sent lightnings from on high, I know not ; but earth and air and fire are alike His messengers, and do His bidding. When all this world passes away in a like ruin, Faith will know where to cling for safety.

26. *But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.*

Thou didst say, O Lord—to point this verse and fix it in our minds—' Remember Lot's wife ! ' Let me not look back longingly to that Sodom out of which Thou hast once delivered me ; let me not stop and linger on my way heavenward, lest my heart grow careless and I never reach my heavenly home. ' Remember Lot's wife ! ' sounds as a sharp warning to all those who are double-minded, who love sin's ways still, and cannot heartily quit them. O Divine Guide, lead me by the hand, and leave me not, till I reach that City where I shall be safe for ever !

27. *And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord :*

He came there full of fear, remembering the awful warnings of the previous day, remembering, too, the gracious answers which God

had given to his intercession. He was deeply moved with Lot's danger and the nearness of judgment—all these thoughts drove sleep from his eyes. Oh that we had hearts like his to intercede earnestly for those many souls who go on towards death and judgment like brute beasts unheeding of their danger !

28. And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

The air was filled with smoke, the sign of a great conflagration going on beneath. Abraham, as he looked on from his distant height, thanked God that he had been kept from the attractions of the sinful city. The sight told him of God's wrath prepared for sinners. It was a figure of the end of all things, of the passing away of this great world and all that seems so secure in it. Will not believers, in that day, look on securely while the conflagration rages round them ?

29. And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.

'For Abraham's sake'—he was God's friend ; those who were dear to him were saved. Let me, too, have a share in the prayers of good Christians ; let their intercession for me prevail to rescue me on the day of danger. Above all, let me have a portion in the all-prevailing intercession of Christ Jesus, which the Church pleads at the Altar. In myself is no worthiness ; but I represent to God the prayers of His saints, the infinite merit of His Son, and, thus praying, I am heard and helped.

30. And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him ; for he feared to dwell in Zoar : and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters.

How weak is Lot's faith ! When told that he should be safe on the mountain, he disbelieved the promise, and pleaded that he should never get there. When told that Zoar should be a refuge for him, he feared to continue there, seeing how near it was to the scene of ruin. If he had remained in Zoar, he might have done good and used the great judgment that had occurred to bring those who lived there to repentance ; but he forsook the haunts of men in his terror, and went to live where fire could not fall upon him, nor houses crumble around him. With such fear had the sights and sounds of that day inspired him.

31. *And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth :*

Lot's daughters had heard of the Flood, and how but one family had been left alive, and they thought that the same might be the case now after a like destruction had come upon Sodom. Living in solitude and with the smoke of the great desolation still overhanging them, they had no knowledge of others surviving, or thought at least that they themselves were cut off from mankind. There are dangers which creep into a solitary life, no less than into that which is led in busy haunts of men. Even in retirement we should watch and pray lest Satan enter.

32. *Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.*

33. *And they made their father drink wine that night : and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father ; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.* 34. *And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father : let us make him drink wine this night also ; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.* 35. *And they made their father drink wine that night also : and the younger arose, and lay with him ; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.* 36. *Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father.*

What are we to say of this conduct of Lot and his daughters? Of him we suppose that he drank to drown his sorrows and fears or to cheer his loneliness ; certainly he had no knowledge of his daughters' evil purpose, or intention of complying with it ; and of them we may say that they acted in simplicity, believing that it was their duty to raise up offspring who should continue man's race. Still, it was not thus that God's true servants lived. If Lot had remained in Abraham's society he would have continued in the straight path ; God's judgments would have taught, not overpowered him. His years in Sodom had brought him down to a lower level.

37. *And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab : the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day.* 38. *And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Ben-ammi : the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.*

Of Lot himself we know no more. We may well suppose that Abraham found him out, maintained and comforted him. We may believe

that he regained peace with God in his latter years. The children of his incestuous union with his daughters became the ancestors of two nations who relinquished the true God for idols, and were continual enemies of God's people. In Numbers xxv. we read how the women of Moab and the idols of Moab brought ruin upon God's host. In Judges xi. and 1st Samuel xi. we hear of the cruelties of Ammon against Israel. When I look back over this chapter I pray that God would keep me in the society of the good, would preserve me in a wholesome fear, would save me from becoming hardened in sin. Fire and brimstone do not always light on vile actions now. Oh no ; but such acts sear the heart and leave there a hardness and indifference wherein no good thoughts or prayers can flourish.

CHAPTER XX

1. Abraham sojourneth at Gerar, 2. denieth his wife, and loseth her.
3. Abimelech is reproved for her in a dream. 9. He rebuketh Abraham, 14. restoreth Sarah, 16. and reproveth her, 17. He is healed by Abraham's prayer.

AND *Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.*

Then Abraham's life, like ours, had its changes and trials. One while he is visited by Divine messengers, enjoys marvellous promises, has great revelations of God's ways made to him. Presently again he is obliged to wander from place to place, is in fear for his life or goods. Let me dispose myself to a quiet and settled faith, remembering that though I change in spirits or in circumstances, my Heavenly Guide is still the same. I do not leave Him behind, go where I will.

2. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister : and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. 3. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken ; for she is a man's wife.

No doubt Abraham prayed while Abimelech slept, and it was in answer to the former's prayer that the latter received instruction. God's warning to the king, and the king's acceptance of it, show what we should think of adultery. Those who escape the sentence

of earthly judges because they are too high in power to be touched, or because their sin is not known, are yet known and sentenced by the Judge of all. He declares that certain sins are deadly, and kill the soul's life. Shall we not believe Him?

4. *But Abimelech had not come near her : and he said, Lord, wilt Thou slay also a righteous nation? 5. Said he not unto Me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother : in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. 6. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart ; for I also withheld thee from sinning against Me : therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.*

Then King Abimelech has a Master over him, Who disposes of his life, restrains his actions, accepts his vindication. Be thou pleased, O Lord, to maintain the innocence of heart, the simplicity of life, with which our dear lads and girls enter a dangerous world. Suffer them not to be corrupted by sin. Be Thou with those who trust in Thee. Thy mercy has often kept me from following out my own sinful desires. I recognise in my own life's history Thy gracious withholding Hand.

'How much, preventing God, how much I owe
To the defences Thou hast round me set :
Example, custom, fear, occasion slow,
These scorn'd bondmen were my parapet.'

7. *Now therefore restore the man his wife ; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live : and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.*

Abraham is a prophet. A prophet is here first mentioned in Scripture. He is one whom God chooses to know and declare His will, one to whom He reveals mysteries. A prophet's prayer was accepted by God. How gracious is our heavenly Father to raise up, amidst our darkness, prophets to be lights of the world, salt of the earth, guides and intercessors for us ! Give us, Lord, eyes to recognise Thy prophets, and hearts to learn from them.

8. *Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears : and the men were sore afraid.*

God has made use of the visions of the night to declare His will. Abimelech awoke, but the impression of his dream remained. He was

stirred up to greater faith and fear of God. I see here something of the dispensation of God towards heathens which Scripture now and then discloses. 'Gerar's guileless king' is but one of those many who in heathen lands looked to and were guided by the Living and True God Whom we worship.

9. *Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us, and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.*
 10. *And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?*

This was long before the seventh commandment was published amidst the thunders of Sinai. That then did no more than renew and proclaim afresh the voice of God within us, bidding us keep holy the marriage bond. Give me grace, Lord, in my teaching or conversation, to speak of purity in a pure manner. Let me feel and bring home to other hearts how great a sin it is to enslave our bodies to adulterous lust. From such downfalls do Thou, Good Lord, deliver me.

11. *And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.*

So the fear of God was spread more widely than Abraham thought. Indeed, it may sometimes be found where we little expect it. He is the Living Dread of His true servants and worshippers. They join together fear and love of that Holy Name by which they are called. And yet far more widely than any profession of faith in God extends an unexpressed reverence, a wholesome awe, which reinforces all that is good within us and is a great means to keep the soul from sin. Those who hearken to this holy fear will be led on from fear into knowledge and love.

12. *And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.* 13. *And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.*

This permission to marry a half-sister, the daughter of the same father, was one of the things which some ancient laws allowed, but

which Moses afterwards in his law forbade, just as some things which Moses allowed Christ Jesus afterwards prohibited. In the country whence Abraham came it had been allowed him without blame. Did he learn all God's will at once? Oh no; God caused him to leave his home, bade him lead a pilgrim life, protected him in danger, showed him marvels to come. How gradual was his education, how much he was continually learning from his heavenly Teacher! Trust in God, confidence that wherever he was God would keep him, did he but keep to God's side, that was one thing which took him a long time to learn.

14. *And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife.* 15. *And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee.*

In this Gentile king bestowing upon the heir of promise presents and favours, I see a figure of that time to come when the sovereigns of this world should press their gifts on the church and endow it with honours and wealth. It was no doubt a good feeling that stirred

'Each convert king to rear
His mother from the dust;
And pious was it to enrich, nor fear
Christ for the rest to trust;'

but yet the Church thus enriched soon lost the apostolic zeal which it had once had.

16. *And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved.*

If Sarah is, according to St. Paul, a type of the Church of Christ, our spiritual Mother, she is here reminded that Christ is her Head and sole Lord, her beauty is from Him, her honour consists in entire loyalty to Him. Sarah received a present to signify that her honour and position were restored her, that she was acknowledged to be Abraham's true wife. She should take no other lord, but remain ever steadfast and faithful to him.

17. *So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children.* 18. *For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.*

Here, as in chapter xviii., prayer is revealed as prevailing with God. The women of Abimelech's household could not bring to the birth,

had travail pains but no happy deliverance, while Sarah remained captive; and it was Abraham's prayer which removed this affliction which had extended to the king's own wife as well as to women in humbler place. There is much needing to be healed in the souls as well as the bodies of those whom I love. Would that my prayers were so urgent, so persevering, as to win an answer of blessing for them!

CHAPTER XXI

1. Isaac is born. 4. He is circumcised. 6. Sarah's joy. 9. Hagar and Ishmael are cast forth. 15. Hagar in distress. 17. The angel comforteth her. 22. Abimelech's covenant with Abraham at Beer-sheba.

AND the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken. 2. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

This was a visitation of mercy—the long-promised heir was born after years of waiting. Sometimes God visits in judgment; His threatenings come true as surely as His promises. Many have been His gracious visitations to His servants; above all, that one, long-desired, when ‘the Dayspring from on high visited us,’ and enlightened our darkness. I would fain cherish a settled conviction that God is true, and that what He has said will surely come to pass, either in judgment or in mercy. Thus my life would glide on peacefully, relying upon the sure words of my Heavenly Friend.

3. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. 4. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5. And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.

I am reminded here of the birth of Christ's forerunner, John the Baptist; he too was given to his parents in their old age, according to a Divine promise. But John's privilege was to see the Saviour with his own eyes and go immediately before Him, in this excelling the old Patriarchs who had long passed away into the unseen world before He came, to Whom they had looked

forward. The birth of Isaac, the heir of promise, is a figure of the power of the Gospel which gives new birth to hearts and raises up believers who become heirs of all the treasures of grace. Before the Holy Spirit came, God had faithful servants, but no heirs of His kingdom in the fullest sense.

6. And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. 7. And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have borne him a son in his old age.

This joy was all the dearer and more precious because it had been long waited for—it reminds us that true religion is not only ‘righteousness and peace,’ but also ‘joy in the Holy Ghost.’ Christ Himself, before His Passion, desired that His own ‘joy might abide in us,’ and ‘be full.’ His Apostles speak continually of Christian joy—and yet this joy has to co-exist with suffering and with tears—it burns on, and is not altogether stifled by pain and care. When God has made us His children, put in our hearts a sense of sonship, it is good news which the world cannot falsify.

8. And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.

Here I am reminded of Hannah, who brought Samuel to God’s House when he had been weaned, and presented him there with feasting and joy, and made that thanksgiving which my Lord’s Mother took as the expression of her own gratitude and made out of it a Magnificat for all believers to use. Isaac was weaned from his mother’s breast (probably in his third year), the time had come for him to lead his own life and take solid food; but there are some souls to whom this step never seems to come in their spiritual progress—they hang on other’s opinions, like the babe on his mother’s breast; they have not learnt to go direct to God and lean on Him rather than on human guides.

9. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

Ishmael mocked Isaac, and might have gone on to ill-treat him. St. Paul sees here the conduct of the unconverted Jews; ‘as he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even so it is now.’ So it is in all times with those who love and serve this world, they are inclined to ridicule the hopes and prospects of God’s true children.

10. *Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.* 11. *And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.*

This sadness of Abraham's at having to part with his dear Ishmael, who would now leave his father's house, and lose what good learning and good ways he had had there, recalls the great Apostle who had 'great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart' when he thought of 'his kinsmen according to the flesh,' the literal Israel, who had despised God's gospel promises and lost them. So great a severance it was and so final. The Apostle's 'heart's desire and prayer' went up to God for those from whom he was parted.

12. *And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.*

'They are not all Israel, who are of Israel,' but the 'children of the promise are counted for a seed'—there is a mystery of rejection, as of acceptance. God chose Isaac to found His chosen family, and passed by Ishmael, the elder, just as he passes by many nations, many hearts, and brings His message home to others; why, I know not. Sarah was right after all in deciding that the time had come for Ishmael to depart; she is a figure of the Christian Church towards the end of the apostolic age, when it was clearly seen that the gap between Jews and Christians could not be bridged over, but that the former were outside the household of faith and contrary to it.

13. *And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.*

Not that God would leave Ishmael without a blessing suited to his character and condition. He became famous, warlike, and the founder of a mighty race and widespread faith. Certainly Ishmael could not become Isaac, nor share the Gospel promises, but in that evangelical history, of which this is a figure, Ishmael could spiritually become the heir, Jews could relinquish their state of separation and share with Christians all the blessings that Christ brought—the son of the bondwoman could regain freedom. Let me never by my pride or harshness put a stumbling-block in the way of any Jews recognising their true Saviour.

14. *And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.*

Here are exiles wandering in the desert long before the Exodus. Hagar and her son lacked guide and water and hope—they wandered and could find no way. Just so those Jews of whom she is a figure; they refused the true Christ and the Gospel promises, and began a long unfruitful journey in which they are still entangled, with their hope of a Messiah so long mocking them.

15. *And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.* 16. *And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.*

Perhaps this poor mother, now Abraham had cast her out, had lost her faith in Abraham's God, and in the promises made to her previously (xvi. 10, 12). Now that she shared no more in the worship and the comforts of Abraham's tent, she seemed also cast out of God's sight and care. Christian mothers are sustained in their worst anxieties on behalf of their children by the thought that God is near, God sees, God cares. Nay, they know that in a wonderful manner He has been pleased to take on Himself a child's condition and be cherished by a tender mother. Mary stood with patience by the Cross and saw her Divine Son die; a Christian mother will follow her pattern, and 'sorrow not as one without hope.'

17. *And God heard the voice of the lad; and the Angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.* 18. *Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.*

God 'heard the voice of the lad'; God promised him present help and future greatness. God sustained the poor mother's fainting heart. Oh that our dear lads would so pray that God would hear their voice! In the great danger and temptations of opening life, how can a lad pass on his way safely unless he prays to Abraham's God and wins help from Him?

19. *And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water ; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.*

This well of living water, bright and clear, which was life in the thirsty desert land, reminds me of my Saviour's gracious invitation, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.' The Prophet also tells us, 'With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.' As we wander in the world's wilderness we are led by God's mercy to some pure and gracious springs whence He refreshes us. Let us beware of the false poisonous refreshment which sin would offer ; that draught sparkles brightly but stirs a fever in the blood which bids us drink and drink again,

'Till the seared taste in foulest wells
Is fain to slake its fire.'

20. *And God was with the lad ; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.* 21. *And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran : and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.*

Ishmael led a bold adventurous life and founded a powerful nation.

We hear of him later as joining Isaac at Abraham's funeral. He soon forgot what Divine promises, what hopes of unseen good, his father had cherished. It was sufficient for him to be the father of renowned chiefs and to be feared by all his neighbours. His mother chose him a wife from Egypt, and so linked him with that land of bondage. He never learnt to walk with God, or to look for His blessing or reward.

22. *And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest :* 23. *Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son : but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.*

This Canaanite prince observed well and acted rightly. He ascribed Abraham's prosperity to God's Presence with him. He reckoned that Abraham had a hidden source of strength, and that his friendship was well worth securing. Perhaps he had heard of the great promises which God had made to Abraham and to his family. Indeed, there was no need to make Abraham take an oath to be friendly—his word would have been sufficient, yet the Patriarch did not refuse to give this additional security.

24. *And Abraham said, I will swear.*

Yet was Abraham right in swearing an alliance with this prince whose descendants were to be the enemies of God's people, and to be destroyed and expelled from the Holy Land? What he meant evidently was to give a pledge of peace for himself and his immediate descendants. It was many hundred years yet before the iniquity of the Canaanites brought down God's vengeance on them. Nor indeed were the Philistines ever in reality expelled or their sea-coast occupied by Israel. God left them to prove His people.

25. *And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away.*
26. *And Abimelech said, I wot not who had done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day.*

If Abraham had armed his servants (as in chap. xiv.) he might have defended the well, or made reprisals; but his work and mission were peaceful, nor did he ever reckon this world's goods worth fighting for. It was only for his friend's life and liberty that he had taken arms and won a victory against mighty odds.

27. *And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant.* 28. *And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.*
29. *And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves?* 30. *And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well.*

These lambs, a sacred seven in number, solemnly offered and taken, were a pledge that the two chiefs referred their agreement to God Himself, and took Him for their Witness. They were also a special attestation of the fact that the well was Abraham's according to public acknowledgment. Yet we find (xxvi. 18) that the very wells which Abraham had digged were seized again by the Philistines, and had to be reclaimed and reopened by Isaac. Of what extreme importance was a well in that thirsty land! I have reason to be grateful to God, Who opens for me wells of truth, of comfort, and of hope, in life's journey. It is not my hand but His mercy that provides them.

31. *Wherefore he called that place Beer-sheba; because there they swore both of them.* 32. *Thus they made a covenant at Beer-sheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines.*

This place called Beer-sheba, which may be rendered either 'the well of the oath' or 'the well of seven,' was a famous sanctuary in patriarchal days; various recollections centred round it; it marked the southern boundary of the Holy Land, as Dan did the northern. Abraham honoured it by a long stay, as he did Dan by his victory over the invader (xiv. 14), thus unconsciously marking out the bounds of his people's inheritance. His descendants long afterwards recalled that they were treading in his footsteps, and were favoured for his sake.

33. *And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the Name of the Lord, the everlasting God.* 34. *And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days.*

Abraham planted the trees because he desired to do good wherever he went, and that future travellers might sit under the shade of his grove. He wished also to mark that place as a shrine set apart for the worship of the True and Living God. Wherever he went, it was as a priest to offer to God, and as a prophet to announce His Name. Amidst a world that was rapidly forgetting their Creator, Abraham's business was to remind men of Him Who made them.

CHAPTER XXII

1. Abraham is tempted to offer Isaac. 3. He giveth proof of his faith and obedience. 11. The angel stayeth him. 13. Isaac is exchanged with a ram. 14. The place is called Jehovah-jireh. 15. Abraham is blessed again. 20. The generations of Nahor unto Rebekah.

AND it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here am I.

The Psalmist says: 'Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts.' But when God

answers this prayer and really sends such a trial, such a proof, our weak faith shrinks back and says, 'O Lord, no, not this.' God had given Abraham great gifts, great mercies, great promises; but He was now about to require from him a proof of obedience such as his heart did not dream of. Thy ways, O Lord, are different from ours. Whatever trial comes, however heart-searching it be, enable us to say with Abraham, 'My heart is ready, O Lord, my heart is ready,' or, in the words which Christ adopted for His own, 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.'

2. *And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*

God asks for the life of Isaac, which He had Himself marvellously given, and on which such great hopes hung. Abraham is bidden to give up the heir of the promises, and apparently bring to nought all the multiplied and assured pledges which God had made. What he loved best, he is to lose; what is most frightful to him, he is to do. He is to offer his son with his own hands as a human sacrifice, such as God abhorred. O strange, O marvellous word! and yet it came to Abraham as clearly and plainly as the other commands and promises of God had come, nor could he doubt it. When we have to give up our dearest ones to die or to leave us, God bids us offer them up with a free heart, a willing resignation, a resolute courage. Is it not He Who asks for them? will they not be safe with Him?

3. *And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.*

Here is prompt obedience, careful attention to all details of the sacrifice. Abraham himself cut and prepared the wood for the burnt-offering, as his custom was. He kept his dread errand to himself, so as not to be hindered by tears or entreaties from carrying it out. His whole heart was bent on obeying as perfectly as possible. To this end all his former acts of obedience had been leading. God had been long preparing him for this signal act of trust.

4. *Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.* 5. *And Abraham said unto his young*

men, Abide ye here with the ass ; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

We stay below ; our eyes follow the father and son as they enter on the Mount of Sacrifice. We may not be able to enter into the feelings of a parent who gives up his dear child to the grave, or into the sorrow of their parting who took each other to be faithful till death, or into the thoughts of the dying themselves when they realise that their last hour draws nigh. Such experiences are known only to God and to the suffering heart. When He requires of us what we love best, nay, all our hopes, our projects, our very life, it is for us to say, 'Not my will, O Lord, but Thine.' We may not refuse the cross which His dear Son bore, and which He now prepares for us. Meanwhile, let us quietly wait for His good seasons and learn, by submission in little things, to be ready for greater.

6. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son ; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife ; and they went both of them together.

In Isaac ascending the Mount to the place where he was to be sacrificed, carrying the load of wood, submitting humbly to his father's will, I recognise my Divine Master on His way to Calvary. Here is the way of sorrows trodden nearly 2000 years before Good Friday. Isaac shares Abraham's obedience and patience ; he gives up his freedom and manly strength ; he bows himself to bear and to die. So Christ our Lord laid aside His power and glory and united His human will with that of His dear Father in working out the plan of our redemption. I cannot enter, dear Lord, into the burden of Thy Cross, the depth of Thy sorrow ; but as far as I am bidden to follow Thee I will, setting my steps bravely along the rough road, and learning the lesson of Thy Cross more and more.

7. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father : and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood : but where is the lamb for a burnt offering ? 8. And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering : so they went both of them together.

No need, dear friend, to search far for what to offer. God knows how to find that. All our choices, our hopes, our plans of good, the comforts we should miss, the health we rejoice in, the dear ones on whom we lean, nay, the very opportunities of grace which sustain us—all these are fit to be offered in sacrifice. They need, indeed, to be sprinkled with Christ's own Blood and offered in

union with His Cross, but, thus purified, they become priceless offerings, and God accepts them graciously. 'God will provide Himself a lamb.' Yes, I do not doubt it; all I desire is grace to yield up the sacrifice when it is asked for.

9. *And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.*

Isaac lay down to die in silence; he submitted to be bound; he received the sentence of death with entire submission, knowing that his life belonged to his father (according to the rights of those days), perfectly loving and trusting that father. Here I see in figure my Lord stretched upon the Cross, and beginning His long death-agony. His was not the pang of a moment, as Isaac's would have been; no, the long hours of death gradually drained out His earthly life, gave Him space still to pray and to teach us. While He hung there, He wrought marvels of mercy for us. Helplessness is sometimes the greatest power, and we do more by patience than if we disposed of all possible means and energies.

10. *And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.*

This was the crowning point of all, the perfection of Abraham's trust and obedience. Up to this point there was the chance, the possibility, of his drawing back, or of Isaac's resisting; but now all was complete, and the actual death-blow about to fall. Yet his hand and heart did not fail. God obtained what He desired, not the bleeding flesh of sacrifice, but the generosity of a perfectly dutiful heart. It is His will to require the same disposition from us through various kinds of sacrifice; and He often carries the whole transaction right out, bids us give up our treasure, and does not interpose at all. Only remember that He knows, He feels, He orders all. It is for our greater good that He lets the blow fall.

11. *And the Angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.* 12. *And He said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me.*

O gracious voice that approves the father's perfect intention, that says, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' God says, 'Now

I know,' speaking in human language. He knows, meaning that He has called forth in visible act what lay deep within. He knows, because He thus lets others know. He knows, because He Himself bestowed that faith and obedience which have been thus gloriously manifested. According to the law of all early nations, the son belonged to the father : he was in his hand and could be disposed of at his pleasure. Therefore, in asking the father for his son's life, God asked only for what the father had a right to give, though it might wring his heart to do so, and turn all his light to darkness.

13. *And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns : and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.*

In this ram substituted for the son of promise, I see a hint of the legal sacrifices which took the place of the true offering for a time, until their insufficiency was proved. Then God's dear Son came Himself and went through the whole action of His death, endured to the end, and no substitute came. Only He was given back to live again with immortal life, as Isaac was rendered to this brief earthly life. The law of sacrifice comes down from the first days of mankind ; it claims for a higher Power what men love and value most ; slain animals are but an imperfect expression of it—Christ Jesus best fulfilled it.

14. *And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh : as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.*

God interposes when need is, only we must climb the mountain first. He bids us obey, and He will see to the rest. That mountain which Abraham and Isaac climbed for the sacrifice seems to have been part of the same ridge that was afterwards consecrated as the site of the Temple, and not far from which Jesus was Himself crucified. How wonderfully God was seen on that mountain in visions, in promises, in fulfilment ! Let us trust Him and give ourselves wholly into His Hand. So His true servants have done in life or in death, in success or in failure.

15. *And the Angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,* 16. *And said, By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son :* 17. *That in*

blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies ;

This great and solemn rehearsal of the promises is the last in Abraham's life, and the fullest of all. It is introduced with the solemnity of an oath ; it foretells abundant blessing and increase and victory. It is based on Abraham's offering of his son, 'because thou hast done this thing.' God had found what He required. He had drawn out of weak humanity the highest response of which our nature admitted, the answer of a heart that could trust God and triumph for His sake over all the hindrances of natural affection and human wisdom. What, give up his all, his son whom he loves, the promises which centred on that son, the hopes and prospects of nature and grace ! Yes, all, when God required. May I try to imitate this whole-hearted devotion.

18. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Here is Abraham rejoicing to see Christ's day : here is the Redeemer dimly manifested to Old Testament faith. This blessing to all nations was not fulfilled in the literal prosperity of the Jews, nor in their preserving for the world a treasure of true religion. It had regard to that One of Abraham's descendants Who was to be also the world's Divine Saviour, and to make possible for renewed hearts that same faith and obedience that Abraham had showed. That promised Benefactor was to open the door of faith to believers from every land and race.

19. So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba ; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.

They went back, but with what thoughts ! Their faith in Divine mercies was fuller. They had tried and proved God, no less than He had tried and proved them. They understood better now what was the true sacrifice that God required, that the slain victim was but a sign of inward devotion. No doubt Abraham passed the latter days of his long life in peaceful meditation on what God had done and what He would yet do, and in instructing in these things those who came after him.

20. And it came to pass after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she hath also born children

unto thy brother Nahor ; 21. Huz his firstborn, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram, 22. And Chesed, and Hazo, and Pildash, and Jidlaph, and Bethuel. 23. And Bethuel begat Rebekah : these eight Milcah did bear to Nahor, Abraham's brother. 24. And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, she bare also Tebah, and Gaham, and Thahash, and Maachah.

The history of Nahor's family comes in, because from them came Rebekah, and afterwards Rachel and Leah, who enter into the chosen household and bear heirs of promise. Evidently among that family some knowledge of the true God had been retained, or bestowed. God kept from the abominations of heathendom those who were to be mothers of His chosen. Yet how small was the light there, how easily corrupted or extinguished, apart from Abraham's household, where alone God spoke clearly!

CHAPTER XXIII

1. The age and death of Sarah. **3.** The purchase of Machpelah, **19.** where Sarah was buried.

AND Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old : these were the years of the life of Sarah. **2.** And Sarah died in Kirjatharba ; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan : and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

Sarah is the mother of the chosen family. No other woman in Scripture has the years of her life counted, or so much told about her burying-place. She died in the land of promise which God had given to her descendants, and no doubt with full faith in her Divine Guide. I naturally compare her with the Mother of my Lord and Saviour ; but there is this difference, that Mary is lost in the glory of her Divine Son ; when or where she died, where her body was laid, in what manner Christ took her to Himself, I know not. With Sarah it is otherwise ; we are allowed to learn how long she lived, to follow her to her grave and know its exact situation. Abraham felt that now their joint wanderings were over, they could no longer talk together of God's grace or His dealings with them. He thought with trembling hope of what might yet await them.

3. *And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying,* 4. *I am a stranger and a sojourner with you : give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.*

Lord, give me a tender regard for the dead. Let me show honour to their lifeless bodies, to their last resting-places, let me cherish their memory. I too, like Abraham, am a sojourner, and must ere long leave this world for somewhat further. It will soon be the turn of my friends to hide away my dead body in the ground. It will be safe there till my Master calls it forth to live afresh.

5. *And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him,* 6. *Hear us, my lord : thou art a mighty prince among us : in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead ; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead.*

Abraham had a good character from the Hittites among whom he lived. They knew that he used his power not for violence, but for defence only. They knew that he was generous and merciful. They honoured, though they did not share, his faith. Thus they willingly offered him a share in their own sepulchres. Let him, if he would, bury his dead wife where their own dead rested ; but his thoughts were otherwise.

7. *And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth.*

What ceremonies are here? Was not Abraham the chosen lord of the land, sole possessor of Divine revelation, the Friend of God Himself? And yet we find him treating the lords of the Hittite town with such lowly respect and courtesy. Such are the ways of God's true children. They honour authority wherever they find it. They recommend true religion by a respectful demeanour to persons in office.

8. *And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight ; hear me, and intreat for me to Ephron the son of Zohar,* 9. *That he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which is in the end of his field ; for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me for a possession of a burying-place amongst you.*

Abraham desired to buy this cave as a burying-place for his wife, for himself, and for his descendants. His purpose was to express his

faith in the Divine Promise by taking solemn possession of this ground. It was to keep his descendants' hearts fixed to the land of Canaan. They would always cherish the hope of living and dying

‘Among their fathers’ tombs.’

Round that sacred spot God's praises would go up, His Name be known. Here the bones of believers would lie and turn to dust, and yet ‘rest in hope.’

10. *And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying,* 11. *Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead.*

Ephron's courtesy and generosity resemble the behaviour of Araunah to King David (2 Sam. xxiv. 22). Ephron and Araunah were both of the Canaanite race, and showed that it was capable of good qualities as of very evil ones. The woman of Sarepta, who entertained Elijah with her last morsel, and the woman of Canaan whose faith won a blessing from our Lord, are also good specimens of that same race. Let it be given to me, as to the saints, to find and bring out all the good that people have in them, not the bad.

12. *And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land.* 13. *And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there.*

I suppose Abraham felt that he could not accept as a gift from men what was already God's gift to him, or at least he desired to set always a pattern of disinterestedness. He was like the great Apostle who said, ‘No man shall rob me of this boasting,’ viz. that he had refused gifts, and done at his own cost all that he had done. Abraham was ashamed to take any advantage; he would never have the name of being grasping or covetous. He anticipated Christ's own maxim that it is better to give than to receive.

14. *And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him,* 15. *My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury*

therefore thy dead. 16. And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant.

The land was worth so much, Ephron said, and Abraham paid it; nor was there any difficulty over the bargain. Abraham bought ground in Canaan enough for a grave; Jacob (xxxiii. 19) enough for an altar. Coined money did not yet exist, but bars of silver of a certain weight served the same purpose. Certainly the land belongs to God, and is only lent by Him to His children for their use, but it is agreeable both with common sense and with faith to buy and occupy a part, to take money for a piece of land. Any doctrine that contradicts this must go on to refuse men any right or title at all to their savings and earnings. It is true that our right both to ground and money is limited by the conditions of this short life which rapidly snatches from us all we have.

17. And the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure. 18. Unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city.

This field, with its trees and cave so minutely described, carries our thoughts on to that other cave which lay in Joseph's garden, and which (like the cave of Machpelah) was newly wrought and unoccupied, wherein the Body of Christ lay for its two days' rest. This cave was to receive the bodies of Abraham and Sarah, that cave the Body of their Son and Saviour. Believers in old time sought this one with reverence to honour the great Patriarchs who lay here; believers say of that one, 'He is not here, He is risen.' Yet His very rest there in death for a while has sanctified the grave to be a house of rest for God's people.

19. And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan. 20. And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying-place by the sons of Heth.

Did Abraham then feel that his own life's work, or God's bountiful promises, had failed when he found that all of Canaan which he had gained was a grave for his wife, and wherein he soon would lie beside her? Oh no; if he had built a city, called a territory after

his own name, settled his descendants in rich properties of their own, then indeed he might have felt that God's promises were all spent, nothing more was to be hoped for. But now he could not be content with earth, he thought of a better country; he worshipped 'a God of the living,' Whom Death could not sever from the believing heart, Who could fulfil His promises in the land beyond the grave.

CHAPTER XXIV

1. Abraham sweareth his servant. 10. The servant's journey: 12. His prayer: 14. His sign. 15. Rebekah meeteth him, 18. fulfilleth his sign, 22. receiveth jewels, 23. sheweth her kindred, 25. and inviteth him home. 26. The servant blesseth God. 29. Laban entertaineth him. 34. The servant sheweth his message. 50. Laban and Bethuel approve it. 58. Rebekah consenteth to go. 62. Isaac meeteth her.

AND *Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.*

His long life was nearly ended. He had lived by faith and looked forward to God's future promises. He had known God too long to complain of old age or fear death's approach. But he had still one duty to fulfil. According to the customs of those days it was Abraham's duty to provide a marriage for his son, and thus continue the chosen family.

2. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: 3. And I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell:

That was Abraham's first care, that the bride should not be a Canaanite. He knew that that race was given to idolatry and to many ill practices. He desired to keep his son free from any entanglements with them. The chosen seed were to live a life apart, dwell in tents, look forward in hope, cherish the service of God, not be lost among Hittites or Philistines. Had they not a treasure of faith which the world knew not of?—and therefore they must not lose it.

4. *But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.*

There was indeed some superstition mixed with their religion. They served other gods, but yet had retained some knowledge of the true God. And Abraham knew their character, that it was upright and pure. Among them he had been brought up, had himself found God, had first learned to believe in and worship Him. He had reason to think that a pure and faithful wife might come from this stem. His soul was set on a religious marriage, one that promised union of hearts, not mere riches or glory.

5. *And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land : must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest ?*

6. *And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again.*

Do not go backward ; God's word is 'forward.' God had set Isaac in the land of promise, with lofty prospects, with present mercies, with a wonderful experience in the past. Let the servant beware lest he bring to nought God's covenant and promise by leading his master's son back into the land beyond Euphrates. Let our eyes be set to follow our Divine Guide onward, sure that His end for us is good.

7. *The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land ; He shall send His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.*

Here is Abraham's faith set forth to us. He knew in Whom he had believed ; he trusted in God's promises, in His overruling mercy. Abraham's faith is ours ; we too say, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.' We too can discern great promises in the future, great mercies in the past, signs of a heavenly guidance over us. With this faith I started in life. I have kept it so far. O God, let me not lose it !

8. *And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath : only bring not my son*

thither again. 9. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter.

A slave's oath then was as good as a freeman's. Eliezer shared in his master's hopes, his master's faith. He made an oath by that covenant of circumcision into which Abraham had entered. He made it as believing that God Himself watched over his promise and would exact its fulfilment. No doubt he esteemed himself happy to be trusted with this errand, and so help to continue the chosen seed and win the promise.

10. And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed ; for all the goods of his master were in his hand : and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor.

Eliezer reminds me of John the Baptist, who knew that he was not the Bridegroom but the Bridegroom's friend, and who said, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' He had no fear of diminishing his own influence in the household, or losing his own prospects by Isaac's marriage. No, all through his long journey eastwards his heart was wholly set on the exact and loyal fulfilment of what he had to do.

11. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water. 12. And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham.

It is well to consult God in a difficult matter. And the servant addressed God as the 'God of Abraham,' because the chief of the tribe represented all the members of it before God—they appeared before God in his person and as associated with him; also, because it was to Abraham specially that the promises and covenant had been given; also, because his servants had seen in Abraham's history many signs of God's overruling providence. Between master and servant there existed entire sympathy and confidence.

13. Behold, I stand here by the well of water ; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water : 14. And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink ; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also :

let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.

Was this a rash prayer? Did he stake too much on a chance word or action? Does he not rather resemble the Apostles when they had to fill up a place in their company, and said, 'Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen'? What he sought was to find for his young master's wife one who was ready to entertain strangers and be kind to all around her—nay, who had a tender care for the poor cattle also. These were the qualities needed for her who was to become the mother of God's chosen household. He was far from making riches the condition of his choice. The person who should please Abraham must be generous and hospitable, like himself.

15. And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. 16. And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up.

Rebekah is diligent and active; she comes out first to the well as evening approaches; she is the first whom Eliezer sees—yet all this was of God's guiding Hand, His inspiration. What seemed chance, or man's fancy, was overruled by Him towards a great end. Let our part be so to live, so to pray, that He may dispose all our ways to find peace and truth. As to Rebekah,

'Love, sweetness, goodness in her person shined.'

Eliezer admired her beauty, her diligence, her air of kindness and uprightness, and he determined to put to her the question over which he had been pondering.

17. And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. 18. And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. 19. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. 20. And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels.

Then she was patient, she did not mind being delayed and having all her toil over again. She was courteous, and readily awaited

Eliezer's full refreshment. She was considerate for the poor beasts, and determined that she would wait on them also and satisfy their prodigious thirst. Evidently she was glad to find an opportunity to wait on travel-wearied men and cattle. All these virtues seemed to join in her, and were set off by the grace and beauty with which God had adorned her.

21. And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not.

Why wait and consider any longer? Have not all things turned out just according to the prayer made and the test chosen? Must not this person, so beautiful, so kind, so unsparing of toil, so given to hospitality, be the appointed maiden? But Eliezer was waiting upon God. He desired to follow exactly where He led; he desired to take no step in this great matter without reflection. Oh that I had always been careful to think first, pray first, lift up my heart to God before I decided on an important step!

22. And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; 23. And said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?

These presents were betrothal gifts, and implied that he would treat about her marriage. When she saw them she knew that a crisis had come in her life. Little had she thought when she stepped down to the well that afternoon and toiled up the steps again with her heavy pitcher that God had such designs ready for her.

24. And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor. 25. She said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in.

Eliezer found in Abraham's kindred, previously unknown to him, the same love of hospitality which Abraham himself had. He saw that the fear of God and an open hand went together here as well as in Abraham's tent. He knew in a moment that he had been divinely guided to find the right person and the right family.

26. And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord. 27. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, Who hath not left destitute my master of His

mercy and His truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren.

Blessed be God for His mercies to us ! they are unbounded, and far beyond our deserts. Blessed be God also for the faith and truth of His saints which have won blessings from Him in which we share ! Blessed be God for His true promises, His faithful guidance, His blessing on our undertakings ! And if this is so now, shall we not on the heavenly shore acknowledge it still more fully ?

28. And the damsel ran, and told them of her mother's house these things.

She had grown up in the performance of home duties, in purity, tenderness, reverence. Suddenly there came on her the call to a new life, a new home, and this under God's manifest Providence. She reminds us of Mary, to whom when at Nazareth (by the well there, it is thought) came a heavenly messenger, a glorious announcement, the news of a destiny beyond man's highest dream. It is in quiet days, prayers, the practice of obedience, that we prepare ourselves for the call which will one day come.

29. And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. 30. And it came to pass, when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and behold, he stood by the camels at the well.

Eliczer waited by the well, something like Christ our Lord by Jacob's well (St. John iv. 30), after He had spoken to the Samaritan woman, and before the people came out on her report to see Him and learn from Him for themselves. Eliczer had come from far to find and fetch home a bride, and was thus a type of that Divine Bridegroom Who came to win our hearts.

31. And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels.

This designation of a stranger and a guest as 'Thou blessed of the Lord' expresses the feeling of the ancients, to whom strangers appeared with something of Divine guardianship about them. God was their Guide, their Defender. He received as done to himself what kindness was showed them—attention to them was

the first of all duties. And besides this hospitable instinct, a sense of special Divine guidance, shown in bringing Eliezer to the house he sought, appears in Laban's words.

32. *And the man came into the house : and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that were with him.*

Certainly this ready hospitality, this attentive courtesy, which marked Laban when young, differs from his character in old age (xxx. 7). There he appears grasping and deceitful ; yet our last view of him, at the end of chap. xxxi. gives a good impression again. Abraham's household was a school of true religion and generous liberality, but where Laban lived religion was mixed with idolatry, all the good traditions of former days tended to be obscured. What should I have been but for the examples, the restraints, the lessons with which God has surrounded me !

33. *And there was set meat before him to eat : but he said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on.*

In this zeal of the faithful servant to bring his master's business to a good end before he refreshes himself, I am reminded of that other Servant of the Lord, appearing in our mortality, Who, when His disciples prayed Him, saying, 'Master, eat,' said, 'I have meat to eat that ye know not of—my meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and finish His work.' To such good servants, whether human only, or Him Who is Divine as well as human, their Lord's interests are their own. In forwarding His business they themselves find comfort and refreshment.

34. *And he said, I am Abraham's servant.*

A short verse, but important, as declaring his position and his master's name, who was (his hearers knew) of their kindred. He begins his tale with 'I am Abraham's servant,' just as St. Paul begins his letters with 'Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ.' He rejoices in this character and condition, and desires to be a good servant and fulfil all that is required of him. What higher end can I have than to be a faithful servant of God and of my brethren ?

35. *And the Lord hath blessed my master greatly ; and he is become great : and He hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses.*

Do not fear to let your sister go in Abraham's footsteps, leave her home and friends, and start for a new country. Look how

Abraham has prospered there ; but I do not say it was his own skill or luck. Oh no, God blessed and increased him ; it is God to Whom he and his look for prosperity.

36. And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old : and unto him hath he given all that he hath.

Isaac is the heir. Sarah, of your own kindred, who is my master's sole lawful wife and free help-meet, bore him. He has already, or will have ultimately, the headship and property of the tribe. Eliezer could not allege at once, or to untaught hearers, what other mysterious promises would come down to Isaac, and which his wife would share with him. Yet those were the best treasure of all for father to hand down to son, for mother to talk of to children.

37. And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell : 38. But thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son. 39. And I said unto my master, Peradventure the woman will not follow me. 40. And he said unto me, The Lord, before Whom I walk, will send His angel with thee, and prosper thy way ; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house : 41. Then shalt thou be clear from this my oath, when thou comest to my kindred ; and if they give not thee one, thou shalt be clear from my oath. 42. And I came this day unto the well, and said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, if now Thou do prosper my way which I go : 43. Behold, I stand by the well of water ; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw water, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink ; 44. And she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels : let the same be the woman whom the Lord hath appointed out for my master's son. 45. And before I had done speaking in mine heart, behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder ; and she went down unto the well, and drew water : and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. 46. And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also : so I drank, and she made

the camels drink also. 47. And I asked her, and said, Whose daughter art thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bare unto him: and I put the earring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands. 48. And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham, Which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son.

In all this history of his doings which Eliezer repeats, there appears a simple truthfulness, a great trust in God's Providence, a great love for Abraham and his family, a thankful heart. One so minded prays and is not ashamed to pray. He thanks God for mercies received and so draws down more. He feels that God has guided and will guide his steps. Such were the faith and practice in which Abraham's household grew up.

49. And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left.

What I ask is a free consent. I desire to know whether you share my opinion as to God's guidance in the matter, whether you are willing to intrust the maiden to me, whether you retain love and affection for Abraham. God's will indeed had appeared throughout, yet God's will does not override our wills, but seeks our free consent and acceptance. The Lord Jesus would have us count the cost before we leave all and follow Him; He bids us freely choose and make answer to His demands.

50. Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. 51. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken.

O wonderful, what can we say? Is not God's will manifest here? What can we add to it, or take from it? Let me too have eyes to discern God's gracious Providence

'Where not too deep for mortal sense.'

Let me observe in my own life and experience the touch of that Merciful Hand which has so far wonderfully guided and blessed me, has brought me back when far astray. Let my choice be to obey and accept what He appoints.

52. *And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth.*

He thanked God first, man afterwards. He worshipped God with lowliest reverence of gesture, as well as words of praise. He knew that God was in every place, and therefore to be worshipped everywhere. He was never ashamed of being known as the servant of the true God, of acknowledging that no wisdom, skill, or persuasions of his own, had carried out this business successfully. Certainly many Christians, living in Gospel times, are too blind, too cold-hearted, or too timid, to behave thus.

53. *And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things.*

These gifts were to confirm the betrothal and to satisfy the bride's family (to whom a sum of money and gifts were due according to the custom of those days). Rebekah, adorned with these jewels and receiving all her glory from her spouse, reminds me of the bride in Psalm xlv., whom the King adorns with gold and 'raiment of needlework,' and the Psalmist encourages with promises of future splendour: 'Hearken, O daughter, and consider, incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. Instead of thy fathers, thou shalt have children whom thou mayest make princes in all lands.' Of such thoughts and hopes the betrothal gifts were a token.

54. *And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master.*

Glory to God for joyful hours, for meetings with dear friends, for the Holy Festivals which mark our year, for the common blessings and mercies of life! Did not my Divine Lord, God's true Servant, part with His friends after a Feast, in which He had blessed, comforted, and cheered them?

55. *And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go.* 56. *And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master.*

Abraham was his master, whom he loved and obeyed. Abraham was now in extreme old age, but yet had lost no claim on his

servant's affection and duty. Nay, Abraham's household represented the Church; it was the stronghold and centre of faith amidst an irreligious world. Eliezer could not rest till he was there again. 'Out of sight' was not with him 'out of mind.' He served 'not with eye-service,' but 'with singleness of heart.' God guiding him all the way, his master waiting for his return; such thoughts as these never left him.

57. *And they said, We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth.* 58. *And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.*

Rebekah here reproduces Abraham's faith. Like him, she left her home, her friends, her gods, for an unknown land, an unknown home. Yet she knew that God was there, and that it was His call she followed. And we find her accordingly in after-life instructed of God's choice between her sons, and grieved at the heathen wives Esau chose. We find, too, her tender remembrance of her old home, in her sending her beloved Jacob thither (xxvii. 48), whom she had instructed in the faith and fear of the true God.

59. *And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men.* 60. *And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.* 61. *And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.*

Rebekah's companions were her nurse and some of her maidens. Of Deborah, her nurse, we know only this, that when she died, in extreme old age, and Jacob buried her, the place was called 'the oak of weeping' (xxxv. 8), so great respect had Rebekah's son and grandsons for their mother's old servant. All this chapter raises thoughts in our minds about good service and the ties that should link a household together. Both Old Testament and New Testament speak of this subject, and remind us how with many a large part of life's trial consists in their behaviour to the fellow-creatures and redeemed members of Christ, over whom, or under whom, Providence sets them. So may I (if I am a master or a mistress) treat my servants as I would have God treat me. Will not God soon set us all on a level before His Judgment Throne?

62. *And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahai-roi; for he dwelt in the south country.* 63. *And Isaac went out to*

meditate in the field at the eventide : and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and behold, the camels were coming.

Isaac went to meditate at eventide. He chose a quiet time and place for thought and prayer. He was far from life's temptations and ambitions, much wrapt up in the thought of God's dealings with him, and of the great destiny in store for his race. Meanwhile God's choicest gift, a good wife, was preparing for him. One was approaching who would double his own actions and energies, and would share all his good thoughts and hopes. Let me never be too busy to give time for thought and for the recollection of God's gracious Presence. Has He not guided me, far beyond my own wisdom or skill? To Him I owe all my blessings.

64. *And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel.* 65. *For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master : therefore she took a vail, and covered herself.*

Here is Isaac's bride whom God has brought him. She brings modesty and reverence as her best adornment. She comes trusting in the protection of an unseen Divine Guide. She represents to us the tender questionings, and fear mingled with trust, with which a girl steps forth into the world and begins her new life as a wife in a new home. Troubles and sorrows lie before her ; dangers too and disappointments ; but she will take each as it comes and learn its lesson. She will find grace and wisdom for each day, will learn to sustain and comfort others.

66. *And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done.*

A good history it was, an interesting chapter it makes. We cannot do better than follow it in our own ways and errands. This servant of Abraham and servant of God is full of a reverential fear and sense of God's Presence and guidance ; he is thoroughly loyal and dutiful to his master, putting himself quite out of sight ; he is trustworthy and discreet in taking care of and in spending the treasures ; he carries through this difficult and delicate errand, and God's blessing rests on what he has done.

67. *And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife ; and he loved her : and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*

Sarah, then, had been all things to her son. Her death, even at her great age, had left a void in his heart. This God mercifully filled by giving him a loved and loving wife. O merciful Lord,

Who givest us more of this world's blessings than Thou Thyself didst enjoy, be pleased to bless wedded love so that it hide not Thee; and when it is broken off by death, or withholden by Providence, lead our hearts to find rest in Thee, Who art best and dearest of all!

CHAPTER XXV

1. The sons of Abraham by Keturah. 5. The division of his goods. 7. His age, and death. 9. His burial. 12. The generations of Ishmael. 17. His age, and death. 19. Isaac prayeth for Rebekah, being barren. 22. The children strive in her womb. 24. The birth of Esau and Jacob. 27. Their difference. 29. Esau selleth his birthright.

THEN again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. 2. And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah.

We know that St. Paul (Gal. iv. 24) found in the position of Ishmael and of Isaac an illustration of those respectively who remained Jews and who became Christians: the one were children of the bondwoman, the others of the freewoman; the one clung to the earthly Jerusalem, and shared her bondage and blindness; the others became children of the Jerusalem which is above, and were set free, becoming heirs of grace. Is it allowable for us (without St. Paul's authority) to carry the illustration further and see in the children of Keturah, freemen and sons of Abraham, yet soon leaving their father's house and presence, a figure of those Christians who only endure for a while, who begin well but do not continue, who soon quit their heavenly inheritance and turn wholly to this world? Ishmael thus would represent to us those who never became Christians; Isaac true Christians, who become and remain God's children; the sons of Keturah those who lose the grace that might have been theirs.

3. And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. 4. And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Ephher, and Hanoah, and Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.

All these were tribes in Arabia (it would seem) and descended from Abraham: their fathers were Abraham's sons by his latest marriage, born of him when he was very old, able to have learnt from

him the knowledge of the true God, able to have gained wise lessons from his long experience ; yet we find their descendants hostile to God's people (so far as we hear of them at all) and destitute of true faith ; nay, readily persuaded by the impostor Mahomet, and led by him to desolate the Church. At this we cannot but marvel, and adore the mystery of God's calling, Who gives grace and light according to His Sovereign Will.

5. And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. 6. But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

Therefore Abraham's silver and gold, his flocks and herds, his men-servants and maid-servants (xxiv. 35) were shared between Isaac and the children of Keturah ; for the presents must have consisted in such things as these ; and we find that Keturah's children were contented, settled eastwards with their gifts, and prospered there. What special thing did Isaac retain? Hope, above all, trust, and peace. He was contented with what his father gave him ; he meditated on God's promises, of which he was the heir ; he looked forward to the blessing to come. It is worth while to contrast the fortunes of Ishmael and Hagar with those of Keturah's children. The two former left the Patriarch's tent in need, in tears, in loneliness, not with any portion of wealth bestowed on them ; yet they enjoyed an angel's presence, heavenly comfort, a sense that God saw and cared for them.

7. And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. 8. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years ; and was gathered to his people.

Abraham departed in a peaceful old age and was gathered to his people. He left to us lessons of trust and faithfulness. He was full of days, and rose up from life's banquet as one well wearied or fully satisfied. What shall we say of the life after death? Does 'gathered to his people' merely mean that he died as they had died? Does 'the God of Abraham' merely mean that God whom Abraham, while he existed, worshipped with transitory homage? Nay, there is another world, another life, where what has begun will be completed. There the souls of the just live before that God Whom they trusted here. There all souls, good or bad, continue their separate being. All this is mysterious and beyond the reach of sense. One day I shall myself experience what it really means.

9. *And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; 10. The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.*

So Abraham's death brought together again Isaac and Ishmael who had been so long parted, broke down the division between them; just as Christ's death broke down the division between Jew and Gentile, reversed curses and separations, made all men brethren. In the sacred cave (so often mentioned) where the patriarchs' bodies were laid, I am taught to think of a still more sacred burying-place, where my Lord's Body was laid for its brief Easter rest. That, too, was a cave, and as yet unused for sepulture. That, too, was a token, an inauguration, a taking possession of the realms of death, that we might enter them without fear, knowing that our Friend has been there.

11. *And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.*

Isaac inherited a blessing for his father's sake. This was the wealth that Abraham bequeathed him. Abraham had trusted in God's mercy, remembered His Presence, walked with Him all his days. The very places where he had sojourned bore in their names records of past mercies. All this Isaac inherited and passed on to those who came after. He too, like his father, while thankful for present mercies, had his eye fixed on the distant future and looked for greater marvels to be one day revealed.

12. *Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bare unto Abraham:*

The history of Ishmael is interposed here. He was born of a bond-woman, but attained temporal advantages far above Isaac. Yet he remained outside the true promises, outside the best hopes of Abraham's house. Isaac was without an heir for many years; while Ishmael had twelve sons who are called princes and occupy strong places and have a name that is feared and honoured. Isaac meanwhile sojourned with his flock by this or that well, setting up or moving his tents, and looking forward. His hopes are not wholly bounded by this visible world.

13. *And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of*

Ishmael, Nebajoth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, 14. And Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa, 15. Hadar, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah: 16. These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations.

These Arabian tribes dwelt some in villages, some in tents. Their power and valour were once famous throughout all the country eastward of Palestine; now their very names can scarcely be traced. They had their day of prosperity and glory, and it passed. But the heirs of promise led obscure lives and looked rather to God's favour than human renown. It was a great thing for humanity, wearied with life's oppressions, deceits, failures, to acquire an eternal hope, a patience that looks elsewhere for reward. This great gift God gave to Isaac's seed, not Ishmael's.

17. And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people. 18. And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: and he died in the presence of all his brethren.

Does Scripture then give any decision as to the eternal state of Ishmael? None; nor do the early books of the Bible ever speak explicitly of the life to come. And yet Ishmael is a figure of those who have earth's blessings and miss those of heaven. Whatever was his own character and position before God, he typically represents those who do not share the position of God's children, who serve Him with outward service only, receive their blessing in material success, and are contented therewith. They pass on and understand not the comforts, the mercies, the sacred communings which true childlike hearts enjoy, and which are to them sure pledges of everlasting communion with their Divine Friend.

19. And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac: 20. And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan-aram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

Of Isaac's history and character we are told very little,—

‘Many the guileless years the Patriarch spent,
Blest in the wife a father's foresight chose.’

Many prayers, many acts of mercy, many hopes of grace were connected with him, but are hidden from us. He inherited and

passed on the blessing of Abraham, the faith of Abraham. In his life he reproduced Abraham's experiences and manner of life. Let me draw this lesson from what Scripture conceals, that most part of our true life is hidden with God. What men observe in us, our behaviour under certain circumstances, really depends on the life-long secret patient growth of character which lies between ourselves and our God.

21. And Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

Isaac prayed repeatedly and continually, and at last won an answer. He knew God's promise was sure that in him the chosen family should be continued, and yet he prayed daily that it might be so. Do not call this lack of faith, because promises are meant to be accomplished through prayers. His wife's long barrenness reminds us of the truth in the spiritual world that all fruitfulness in good is of God. We cannot do any good thing but by Him. It is He Who has 'chosen and set us that we may bear fruit and that our fruit may remain.' What good could my character bear apart from grace? God, Who is Lord of both worlds, gives natural offspring to parents, and sows in the children's hearts seeds of love, of truth, of duty.

22. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the Lord.

Rebekah's pains and fears, which led her to consult God, and strive to find out what would be the issue of her pregnancy, figure to us the troubles of God's Church which contains within her both true and false Christians, and is consequently rent by divisions and offences. Rebekah went to consult God—where? Perhaps it was to some holy place where God was manifested by word or vision, or perhaps to Abraham himself, for he was still alive at this time. Anyhow, she sought an answer and found it.

23. And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

These unconscious lives began already to manifest difference. They were derived from one father and mother; they lay as yet folded together within the womb, yet God viewed them as different in their character and in their end. God wonderfully foreknows what we

shall be. He assigns our lot according to His sovereign good pleasure. What is it in one rather than another that obtains Divine favour, that meets with steps of grace and helps towards glory? Indeed I know not. Human worthiness cannot account for it. I adore the depth of the Divine Counsels which I cannot fathom.

24. *And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.* 25. *And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.* 26. *And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.* 27. *And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.*

The difference of their appearance at birth corresponded with their after difference of character and destiny. Esau's courage and success as a hunter, Jacob's quiet life and home duties, are a figure of two sorts of lives; one which is set on seizing the advantages of this present world, and the other which looks to God's approval and the hope of heaven. Lord, give me rather Jacob's part, a well-ordered life, a humble trust, a knowledge of Thee, Who art the God of Jacob. There is more good for me in this service than in the rich spoil which delights Esau's children.

28. *And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.*

Isaac's partiality for his eldest son, whose gifts he enjoyed, and Rebekah's tenderness for the younger, who was bent on pleasing her, are human and natural instincts. But with God 'there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' We can trace the causes of human preference for one or another, but not the reasons of God's choice. I know not, O my God, why Thou hast chosen me to know of Thy salvation. Let me never wilfully lose the mercy I have freely received.

29. *And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint:* 30. *And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.*

Esau, wearied out with his fruitless chase, and looking eagerly on the tempting mess which his brother had prepared, represents to me

the children of this world who spend their life in a weary round of search for new pleasures, new excitements. They wish to experience all sensations, make trial of all that life has to offer. Nay, they at times envy the quietness, the comforts, the hopefulness of God's children. The soul, like Esau in his hunting, runs a varied round, yet finds nothing settled, nothing satisfying. What is the fragrant red pottage but the pleasure of a moment which takes the restless fancy?

31. *And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.*
 32. *And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?* 33. *And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.*

Let me never part with my birthright; I mean, with my place in the covenant of grace, with my hope of heaven, with my trust in God's tender mercy. Nay, let me cling to this all my days, and sooner lose all else than it. With Jacob it meant the coveted promise, the prospect of Canaan, the position of ancestor to the world's Redeemer. But with Christians it is faith's portion and a place in the everlasting kingdom. It would seem that Jacob was grasping and unbrotherly in thus turning his brother's eager fancy to his own profit (though God's wise purpose was wrought out thereby): but Christians are innocent and wise in sacrificing temporal things for eternal, in yielding up a mess of pottage and laying fast hold on eternal life. Jacob gave up his dinner, but obtained the right to a blessing; so may I give up much pleasure or praise for the approval of my God.

34. *Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.*

We read with surprise how easily, how carelessly, Esau parted with his right to the mysterious blessing. But this significant transaction is daily repeated, and we cease to wonder at it. We lose God's favour, and triumph over the restraints of conscience, the warnings of God's Spirit,

‘sell true bliss
 For wealth or power, for pleasure or renown,’

and go on our downward road without heeding. Indeed, the time will come for tears and vain regrets; fruitless tears those, for Esau could never get back what he had thrown away. May I prevent God's judgment by sincere fruitful repentance, which may effectually change my condition in His sight. I have not yet despised the call beyond remedy. I trust to Christ's precious Blood and fruitful tears to wash out my contempt for Divine Grace.

CHAPTER XXVI

1. Isaac because of famine went to Gerar. 2. God instructeth, and blesseth him. 7. He is reproved by Abimelech for denying his wife. 12. He groweth rich. 18. He diggeth Esek, Sitnah, and Rehoboth. 26. Abimelech maketh a covenant with him at Beersheba. 34. Esau's wives.

AND *there was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. 2. And the Lord appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of:*

Isaac was preparing to enter Egypt, as his father had done, to find sustenance there, but God bade him remain in the outskirts of the Holy Land. No doubt he consulted God and sought earnestly to know His will, before taking the journey, and the answer came that he was to remain, not to enter Egypt. Let me in all my ways acknowledge God, and then He will direct my paths. Let my way, wherever it leads here below, be disposed towards the attainment of everlasting salvation. I am but a traveller on earth, and look for a lasting settlement elsewhere.

3. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father;

In Isaac's more prosperous days he had not been reminded of the blessing, but when famine and flight are upon him God renews mercies and revives blessings. His comforts come when other comforts fail. Thus the saints are not really deserted, though they may seem so outwardly. Isaac was deeply certain that his father had not believed in vain. His father had passed away without seeing his hopes realised; but yet Isaac knew that those who trusted in God are not deceived. He did not say, 'My father Abraham believed in God, and nothing has come of it.' Oh no; both he and Abraham had learnt to trust and wait; death did not close their view.

4. And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;

Though not Jews, we are Isaac's seed. We look to him as our spiritual father. His blessing has come upon us; that is, because

Christ has brought us into the sacred family. Devout hearts in old time must have pondered over this promise. Who should this foretold Benefactor be? How shall He profit the whole world? What blessing could He bring upon nations so diverse, so estranged, so fierce, so plunged in idolatry? How comes this more than human power to be lodged in Him? Faith now can solve all these difficulties and see them answered in the Person and work of our Divine Saviour.

5. *Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.*

Abraham's call and Abraham's obedience had both been prepared by God; one was knit with the other. He Who called him called him to be faithful and obedient, but yet his calling is attributed here to his good deeds in order to give a pattern and example to Isaac. This is the way for us to bring about the fulfilment of promises; we must fulfil the condition on our part, God will not fail of His. It is the obedience and perseverance of His elect that declare that He has chosen them from all eternity. God has given to us, as to Abraham, His charge, His commandments, His statutes, His laws; let us not be slow to keep them. The way of obedience is the path which leads to true blessedness. It is my happiness to be the servant of so good a Master, to wait on His look, to apprehend His bidding.

6. *And Isaac dwelt in Gerar:* 7. *And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon.*

This may well have happened early in Isaac's wandering life, when his wife had not yet borne him children. It was a like experience to that which Abraham had had both in Egypt and in the same place of Gerar with King Abimelech (probably another king of that name) many years before. In his anxiety on account of his wife's beauty, which made him fear both for his own life and her honour, I see figured the responsibility of possessing truth. Divine Truth is beautiful and pure and full of charm to true hearts, but those who enjoy it are in danger of seeing it enslaved or corrupted, nay, of losing it through their own fault; and yet, if they cling fast to it, they will come off conquerors. Truth sets free at last all those who love it.

8. *And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window,*

and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. 9. And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife : and how saidst thou, She is my sister ? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her. 10. And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us ? one of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldst have brought guiltiness upon us.

Oh that I had courage to speak the truth always, and never be ashamed of confessing myself a Christian under all circumstances ! Isaac had prevaricated about his wife, and was rebuked by the heathen king, but I have constantly been afraid to acknowledge myself a Catholic Christian. I have avoided saying grace at meals openly, or standing up for a friend, or declaring my belief in Divine Providence—anything rather than show that I loved God's Truth and held to it.

11. And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.

This outward order of protection from the king expressed to Isaac and Rebekah the protecting care of God's Providence, which they had distrusted. Surely 'He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep'; surely 'the Lord Himself is thy Keeper, the Lord is thy Defence upon thy right hand.' Believing this, relying on this, I shall walk on through this evil world with a calm and quiet mind, knowing that all seeming enemies and dangers are under the orders of the King of kings, and bound to work out my salvation.

12. Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold : and the Lord blessed him. 13. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great : 14. For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants : and the Philistines envied him.

He came there flying from famine, and he grew rich. No other crops prospered in the sterile soil, but he alone found a rich return ; his very exile, necessity, anxiety, all turned to his profit. What field is there in which I can sow liberally and be sure of a rich return ? Surely the poor and their necessities offer me this good ground, if I wisely and liberally use it. God says, 'He that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.' Oh may I find this saying true, and find an hundredfold of comfort myself when I need it !

15. *For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth.* 16. *And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we.*

Many false teachers have tried to stop up the wells of truth with which God refreshes souls. Once these wells flowed with living water for the comfort of many, but now they seem all choked and dry. Courage! the water is there, it is ours, it has not lost its virtue; man alone has interposed error and obscurity. It is God's saints who have opened springs of truth to us, it is our own folly that has spoiled and choked them. Those who love Him will try to open access to the spring and refresh other souls thence. Isaac found that envy had grown up round him, and he had to fly into the desert again, but he took God's blessing with him.

17. *And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there.* 18. *And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.*

These were Isaac's heritage; he called them by the same names, drank the same water from them that his youth had known. So it is our task to provide for thirsting souls access to the same springs from which Christians in old time were refreshed; it is not new truths that will save us, but free access to the old. Nothing can be devised more powerful, more consoling, more illuminating, than the old doctrines of the Gospel; they are enough for every mind and heart, each can take his own draught therefrom and live.

19. *And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water.* 20. *And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him.* 21. *And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah.*

I thought to find peace, and behold contention, but yet it is wiser to yield to that contention and so let it die out. This well called 'strife,' and the next one called 'enmity,' often are opened on our path; but let us overcome evil with good, let us do good though we suffer for it, let us pour out our best care, best succour, though we reap only ingratitude. Isaac passed from place to place,

leaving fresh sources of water open behind him, just as his Divine descendant 'went about doing good,' healing, setting free, and yet being Himself spoken against for it.

22. *And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.*

Lord, enlarge my heart that I may find room there for Thee and for other souls; let me have a large heart; and let me, like Isaac, return ready acknowledgments to Thee Who art the Giver of peace and love. He did not regard this hard-won repose as the fruit of his own labour, but attributed it to the grace of his Almighty Friend, on Whose blessing he had learnt entirely to depend. We are told that 'the Lord shall give His people the blessing of peace': this is indeed the best of gifts,—peace within, free from encroaching passions,—peace without, a space in which to work and pray,—peace in finding out and living by sacred Truth. Praise to God for opening all these comforts to us!

23. *And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba.* 24. *And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for My servant Abraham's sake.*

At Beer-sheba Isaac had lived in his youth; there he had learnt to worship the true God; thence God had called him to the mysterious sacrifice on Moriah, and thither he had returned as one risen from the dead. This ancient sanctuary of believers stood on the southern edge of the Promised Land; it was the last shrine to which their hearts turned before entering on the desert beyond; and God recalls to Isaac there the old promises and hopes, bids him lose sight of present dangers in the thought of an invisible protector, of present insignificance in the thought of future glory. He was to be blessed for Abraham's sake, and shall not we find richer and surer blessings for Christ's sake?

25. *And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.*

His first care was for worship: first of all, he set up God's Altar and served it, or rather rebuilt that at which his father had worshipped of old; then he turned to think of his own rest and refreshment. Isaac went from place to place, nor did he ever attain even the

greatness and influence which his father had had ; his hopes were set on the Unseen ; he is like one for whose thoughts and hopes this present world is all too small. He never complained that God's promise to him had failed or been delayed. No, for he had learned to wait and look to the end.

26. *Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army.*
 27. *And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you ?*

The princes of the Philistines come to Isaac to make an alliance just as they (or their fathers) had to Abraham years before (xxi. 22). In Isaac there is an uniformity of character, a simplicity and uprightness on all occasions, which make him sought even by the world's magnates, who might (one would have thought) have despised his friendship ; but he passes on, carrying God's grace and blessing with him. Who will grant us this uniformity and calmness of heart, to remain the same whether in prosperity or adversity, never puffed up, never prostrate, never forsaking the even road of peace ? If we were thus, other souls would be strengthened and helped by knowing us.

28. *And they said, We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee : and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee ;*
 29. *That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace : thou art now the blessed of the Lord.*

The Philistine king recognised in Isaac the blessing and presence of that God Whose servant he was. He felt that he had driven him away unjustly and unwisely ; therefore he sought to minimise the difference between them and to make all things smooth for the future. It were good for me to follow him at least in this, that I recognise God's servants and ask for their goodwill and prayers. Well worth while for me to find out true hearts, families where God is sincerely loved, where earnest prayers and good communions are made ; joining myself to such, I shall dwell more closely with God.

30. *And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink.* 31. *And they rose up betimes in the morning, and sware one to another : and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.*

Isaac does not reproach Abimelech with wells stopped up, or covenants broken ; he represses all the complaints he might easily

have made; he gladly embraces the occasion of renewed peace. I see in his patience, his love of retirement and prayer, his disinterestedness and humility, some traces and rudiments of the Prince of Peace, his descendant according to the flesh. In Old Testament saints I welcome many scattered rays of that Divine and perfect excellence which at last 'showed itself on the earth and conversed with men.'

32. *And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We have found water.* 33. *And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba unto this day.*

So the well which had been called by Abraham 'well of seven' (referring to the seven lambs which were a token and pledge of the treaty that he made there) is now cleared out and made to flow afresh by Isaac, and the same name renewed to it, only now with reference to the 'oath' which had been freshly made. In traversing Genesis I move amidst deep wells and springs of truth, many of them half choked up by men's ignorance or rash conjectures; be it given to me to reverently open up the old truths, find Christ hidden under figures, draw lessons and comforts from the old histories. In this world's dry, thirsty journey how welcome to us is Holy Scripture with its openings into thoughts of comfort.

34. *And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite:* 35. *Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.*

What mistake did Esau make? He allied himself by these marriages with the powerful tribe of the Hittites, and became thus a great lord; soon he appears at the head of a host, soon he occupies a mountain stronghold, while his brother is defenceless and solitary. True, but Esau's wives were very different from what his grandmother and mother had been; they did not agree with the piety, the modesty, the care for strangers, the respect for the poor, the waiting on God's promises which marked the holy household; they could not share in the prayers that went on there; they never cared to learn about the True God and His wonderful dealings. Isaac and Rebekah felt that such mothers would not bring up children to follow Abraham's steps.

CHAPTER XXVII

1. Isaac sendeth Esau for venison. 6. Rebekah instructeth Jacob to obtain the blessing. 15. Jacob under the person of Esau obtaineth it. 30. Esau bringeth venison. 33. Isaac trembleth. 34. Esau complaineth, and by importunity obtaineth a blessing. 41. He threateneth Jacob. 42. Rebekah disappointeth it.

AND it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, *My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I.*

Isaac had to bear many years of blindness, for he lived till Jacob's return from Mesopotamia. In those days there were no books to read to him, not even Scripture. He lived among idolaters, and had few friends to cheer him. He had to bear the apparent contradiction between the glorious promises of which he was heir and his actual insignificance in the world. No doubt his Divine Friend illumined his darkness with some rays of comfort and hope. But I view blind Isaac not only in himself but as representing the position of his descendants, the Jews, in the presence of Christ's Light. Just as the veil on Moses' face, so the darkening of Isaac's eyes figures the condition of the Jews seeking for the true Messiah, but not being able to discern Him.

2. *And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death:*

Isaac called Esau, but God's call was to Jacob. Isaac had his plan for blessing Esau, but God overruled it otherwise according to His own will. 'It is not,' says St. Paul, 'of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth.' No; for God, Who knows hearts, saw that in Jacob which fitted him to be heir of the blessing, and brought it about infallibly that he should be heir. In this chapter I mark and marvel at man's sins bringing about God's wise purpose at last. Isaac lived many years in the expectation of death. Once, long ago, on Moriah, he had made up his mind to die, and he practised daily the same submission, the same preparation.

3. *Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison;*
4. *And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to*

me, that I may eat ; that my soul may bless thee before I die.

This kind of inheritor of the blessing, armed and vigorous, bringing luxuries, trusting in his own strength, is such a Messiah as blinded hearts looked for,—one who would prevail by his own might, satisfy his friends with this world's riches, obtain their praise and goodwill thereby ; but not such, O Lord, is Thy King, meek and gentle, welcomed by humble hearts. Esau willingly accepted his father's commands, though he had sold his birthright long ago, because all he hoped to obtain was some temporal profit and honour.

5. And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. 6. And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, 7. Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the Lord before my death. 8. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee.

Rebekah knew that Isaac's blessing marked an important and decisive occasion, and that the promises would thus be solemnly handed over to the heir ; and therefore she devised a plan to make Jacob receive the blessing, not Esau. Jacob, she knew, was designed by God to receive this place, and was fitter for it. God's counsels, she knew, pointed this way ; her whole heart was set on obtaining the blessing for Jacob. In all this history I discern two things : one is the deceit of mother and son, and I blame it—it was punished by trouble and lifelong separation coming upon them ; and the other is, God's purpose, God's design ; that was infallibly wrought out, even through men's fault,—that I recognise and adore.

9. Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats ; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth : 10. And thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death.

What was the meaning of this savoury meat which Rebekah offered to prepare and by which Isaac was to be propitiated ? It reminds me of the promises of the Law, which were temporal and earthly, and consisted in long life, good harvests, peaceable days, a posterity to preserve the family name. It reminds me, too, of Christ's

bountiful, healing, beneficent works of mercy for the hungry or suffering. By these outward temporal benefits souls were to be attracted towards Christ and His eternal promises.

11. *And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man :*

12. *My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver ; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.*

Jacob feared only to be found out ; the thought of deceit in itself was not insupportable to him. He ought to have said, ' God, Who is essential Truth, can bring about His design without any fraud of mine.' No doubt he would thus have reaped the blessing and had no bitterness with it ; but I see here the figure of a deeper difference to be bridged, a wider personification undertaken. Who was it that came disguised as a sinner, wrapt in the robe of faulty humanity, while inwardly blessed for evermore, who incurred a curse and turned it into a blessing for all mankind ?

13. *And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son : only obey my voice, and go fetch me them.* 14. *And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother : and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved.*

Rebekah was moved to this deceit by her love for Jacob and by her strong sense of God's purpose for him ; no doubt she showed lack of faith in resorting to it. But I view in her the Church of God, the mother of redeemed souls, bidding us approach without fear of the curse, bidding us shelter our unworthiness under Christ's atonement. Nay, she seems to represent Divine Grace, making us and our doings acceptable, providing for us what our own strength or merits could never supply. Thus I look beyond human frailty to the deep mysteries which lie hidden beneath.

15. *And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son :*

These goodly garments of Esau, under which Jacob was hidden, are like the splendour of the Jewish ritual and kingdom, the majesty of the Prophets, the whole glory of the Ancient Law. These belonged to the Jews, and were their pride and delight ; but a day came when Esau was disinherited, and then Jacob was found clothed in them. So Christians pass beneath the outward apparel of legal ceremonies and behold the Son of God veiled there, recognised by true hearts, the true Prince Whom this purple robe covered.

16. *And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck :*

The goat was the sin-offering. In the goatskin which disguised Jacob I see a figure of those sins, not His own, which Christ took on Himself. Jacob was not Esau, though he wore a skin of hair ; so Christ was not a sinner, though He appeared in sinners' semblance. As Jacob, when he had won the blessing, laid aside the hairy skin ; so Christ abolished the guilt of sin and the malediction of the Law, and appeared holy and harmless, ever separate from sin, ever able to make intercession for sinners.

17. *And she gave the savoury meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.*

Jacob has merely to wait. His mother prepares all things and puts them in his hands. Esau, meanwhile, searches the fields for game, and then has to cook and season what he has caught ; and after all he is too late, his father cannot relish the viands. Jacob meanwhile seems to say, 'I will not trust in my bow ; it is not my sword that shall help me' ;—he receives all without his own labour ; he rests on favour, not deserts. Who does not see here wonderful portraits of those who by mercy win, or by self-righteousness lose, the eternal inheritance?

18. *And he came unto his father, and said, My father : and he said, Here am I ; who art thou, my son ?* 19. *And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn ; I have done according as thou badest me : arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.*

I do not excuse Jacob's fraud or Isaac's dulness ; but I behold here mysteries in which they are the unconscious actors. Who is this believing son, hidden beneath the name and garb of the profane, yet coming before his father to win a far-reaching blessing ? His father hears him, because he appears as Esau, and confesses that he bears Esau's character. All this makes me think of Good Friday, of Christ's bearing our sins and appearing thus before His heavenly Father. Again, in Isaac's being beguiled, I recognise (as he afterwards did himself) the will of God, which led him, against his intention, to bestow the blessing on the true heir—on him whose character fitted him best for the inheritance. Isaac's great feebleness and blindness were not really deceived, though it seemed so at the time. His God still watched over him and ordered all things for his good.

20. *And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the Lord thy God brought it to me.*

This was an equivocation in the letter, but yet true in the spirit. Jacob meant it deceitfully, but God overruled the words. Was it not God's favour, God's will, that brought about the mother's suggestion and the son's acceptance of it? In Isaac's family it was, I see, the custom to ascribe all things, even good luck in hunting, to Divine Providence; the sons were not ashamed to ascribe their success to God's gift.

21. *And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not.* 22. *And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.* 23. *And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him.*

Isaac appears to take all possible precautions, and yet he is caught by his son's deceit, which, by God's deep providence, brought about Divine ends. In Jacob, thus standing in Esau's place, presenting Esau's hands to be touched, I behold my Saviour taking on Himself my sins and unworthiness and using His own Divine Voice to present my petition. He Who is God is yet disguised as man, and takes the place of sinners. His Father takes Him for such, and deals out to Him what is meant for them. O great mystery which runs through all Scripture, is felt through all ages!

24. *And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am.* 25. *And he said, Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought it near to him, and he did eat: and he brought him wine, and he drank.*

Isaac takes this repast for Esau's gift, and blesses the giver accordingly. But I see here the true Jacob offering Himself as a sacrificed Lamb, shedding His precious Blood for our salvation. This is the very mystery of substitution which Isaac himself in his youth had prefigured on Moriah. I am happy to have the true Jacob to plead for me with my Heavenly Father.

26. *And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son.* 27. *And he came near, and kissed him:*

and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed:

This kiss of fatherly love is the sign of my reconciliation with God.

In this scent of Esau's clothes (which Rebekah doubtless kept in drawers with fragrant herbs of the field), I see the fragrance of all good works which adorn the Church of Christ, the congregation of redeemed souls. This is no longer Esau's dress, but has become the raiment of the true Jacob. This is what is expressed by the Psalmist's words: 'Thou hast put off my sackcloth and girded me with gladness.' Christ appears rejoicing in His glory and bestowing His grace upon us that we too may be glorified in Him.

28. Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine:

This dew of heaven is Divine grace; this fatness of the earth is virtue and holy love; this corn and wine are the blessings hidden in the Holy Sacrament of Christ's Death. He was Himself the Corn of wheat which fell into the ground and died, yet revived and bore much fruit; He was the true Vine, of which we are the branches. Under these figures of temporal blessing Faith recognises a store of heavenly treasure.

29. Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.

This never came true of the literal Jacob. Oh no; he led a humble, dependent life. Esau lorded it over him when they met. Esau and his children enjoyed far greater peace and prosperity than the house of Jacob. Jacob's wandering life, domestic sorrows, 'few and evil days,' ended in 'the house of bondage,' with darkening prospects for his posterity. True, but Faith knows what true blessing is, and how it comes, takes its Beatitudes from Christ's own lips, and knows what blessings and what woes He has infallibly pronounced. Faith sees included in this blessing all true Christians who are united in heart to their Lord, and suffer and rejoice with His grace to shelter them.

30. And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. 31. And he also had made savoury meat,

and brought it unto his father, and said unto his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me.

All was done now, the blessing given, the door shut; and yet Esau remained in ignorance, fully persuaded that his present would be acceptable, fully persuaded that he would obtain the blessing. O Lord, will there not be, when life ends, some cases of self-deception like this, of souls who trust that they are in the way of peace when they have missed it, trust that their life and works will be acceptable in God's judgment when they will be rejected? I entreat Thee, let my eyes be open in time, let me know where and what I am before that time when tears shall have no power.

32. And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau.

Esau is as a stranger now; neither his voice, nor presents, nor obedience avail to replace him. Jacob has taken sonship and blessing away. Now what Jacob did deceitfully was overruled by God to work out His Divine plan. The blessing was won by Jacob and lost by Esau as a figure of Christ's work when He put aside the old covenant and appeared before His heavenly Father wearing our nature. Now we are 'blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' Now our Father receives us sinners as His dear children.

33. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.

Isaac marvelled and trembled, discerning how God had wrought all, how God had turned all things according to His foreordained plan. He did not become angry with Jacob, nor attempt to revoke what he had unknowingly done. No, for he saw that he had been but an instrument in God's hands. 'Who is it,' he says, 'who came and won the blessing?' This is like the saying of Saul at his conversion, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' I strove with Thee unknowing, but now I discern Thy power. Isaac adored God's Providence, and submitted himself wholly to His will.

34. And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.

Esau valued his birthright far otherwise now than he once did, when he sold it contemptuously for the mess of pottage. He had learnt

his own folly, yet rather regretted its consequences than really felt contrition for his contempt. His bitter cry could not get back what had been lost. So lost innocence, lost peace, do not return for all our regret. Still, when I find myself awakened to my loss, conscious that I have thrown away Divine favour, I will use the words of the prodigal son, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' There is a virtue in those words which Esau's bitter cry lacked.

35. *And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing.* 36. *And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?*

Jacob had stolen the blessing, had taken his brother's place. This fraud of Jacob's, wrong as it was, figures to me that holy and lawful prudence wherewith persevering hearts retain their place in God's favour; nay, rise to a higher place, while the rash and faithless lose what once they had. Let me ponder over this warning, 'Hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown,' or 'That which thou hast, hold fast till I come,' or 'So run that ye may obtain.' I know that many who were once more holy, more learned, more useful than I, have fallen away afterwards from all good, and I draw the lesson, 'Be not high-minded, but fear,' and yet trust Divine mercy to make sure to me what they lost.

37. *And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?*

Yet what Isaac had really conveyed to Jacob was not temporal lordship nor wealth, but something higher and deeper. Look to those words of Christ's, 'The servant abideth not in the house for ever, the son abideth ever: if therefore the Son make you free, you are free indeed.' They point us to our true Lord and Ransomer and the blessings He bestows and which are the best. We do not find that Esau served Jacob—far from it; nor that Esau lacked while Jacob abounded in riches—quite the reverse. Esau could feed four hundred men, while Jacob and his family suffered assaults of famine and had to fly into Egypt before it. The privileges of Jacob were evidently of another order, and connected with an eternal hope, a spiritual refreshment, a treasure of heavenly riches, all as yet unexpressed in words.

38. *And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept:*

Esau thought only of temporal loss, of dignity diminished, and was deeply vexed with his own folly, but yet could not change what had been done. It is a grave truth that there are, in the end, but two conditions, either blessing or cursing, either with Christ or without Him, either spiritual life or spiritual death. Let my tears be shed now while they may wash out the past, let me lay hold on the promises now while they are within my reach, lest I cry out too late when the door is shut.

39. *And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above;* 40. *And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.*

This was joy for Esau, to lead a free and warlike life. His land was to be barren, 'far from fatness of earth and dew of heaven' (for 'far from' rather than 'of' seems to be the meaning in verse 39, with which Malachi i. 3 agrees). What fertility there was should be due to his own toil; but a greater resource lay in his good sword—strong arm and venturous hand should bring him deliverance. He represents those who rely on their own strength and feel no need of a Saviour. They fancy that to get free from vice, to obtain inward peace, their own strength suffices. Christ's yoke is to them unmeaning, a mere burden, a mere form; while to believers He is life itself. Let me submit to the true Jacob and find freedom and peace in that subjection.

41. *And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.*

Then he could not forgive Jacob for gaining the blessing which he had himself despised, just as the Jews could not pardon the Gentiles for welcoming the Messiah whom they had rejected. Jacob had won the blessing, yet his way of gaining it was so much mixed with his own deceit that it had brought hatred between him and his brother. This was not God's meaning, nor did the blessing involve in itself the least diminution of Esau's present temporal privileges and glory; but Esau could not put from him the

thought that he had been overreached. Nevertheless Divine mercy still watched over him and prevented his murderous design from succeeding.

42. And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. 43. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran;

Rebekah had inspired Jacob with courage to gain the blessing; now she has to inspire him with fear, lest he should remain at home and lose life and blessing too. It is very wonderful how she takes the act done, the words said, as irrevocable, does not bid Jacob offer excuses or make promises of reparation. She knew the words said to her of old (xxv. 23), as regards the destiny of her two sons. She remembered the incident of the birthright sold. She knew many things that threw a light on the character of each, and therefore she set herself to fulfil the purposes of God for future ages which were committed, she knew, to Jacob.

44. And tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away; 45. Until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?

Had not the true Heir and Son, as soon as His royalty was recognised, to flee away from Bethlehem into Egypt and abide there a while, lest the wrath of this world's monarch cut Him off prematurely? Rebekah feared to be deprived of both her sons, by Esau becoming a criminal, by Jacob being murdered; so she was contented to choose Jacob's exile instead, which was in those days an absence almost like death, little cheered or broken by letters or messages. Nor did she ever again see him in this world. In looking back through the chapter I marvel to see in Rebekah such a mixture of faith and distrust, such a perception of God's great ends and such a wrong hasty choice of means to carry them out. No doubt the many years of her son's absence, and the prospect of her own end as it drew near, refined her character and rooted her thoughts on the eternal unchangeable Friend Who is all-sufficient to bring about what He has promised.

46. And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the

daughters of Heth, such as those which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?

The daughters of Heth wearied out Rebekah because they had no share in her prayers or in her hopes. Their children were brought up outside the circle of ideas in which Abraham's family lived. They never learnt to keep God's statutes, worship Him in truth, rely on His grace and promises; but I do not suppose that Rebekah would have disclosed her vexation with Esau's household unless she had designed thereby to influence Isaac to send his son Jacob away accompanied with his goodwill and blessing. She knew when to be silent and when to speak.

CHAPTER XXVIII

1. Isaac blesseth Jacob, and sendeth him to Padan-aram. 6. Esau marrieth Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael. 10. The vision of Jacob's ladder. 18. The Stone of Beth-el. 20. Jacob's vow.

AND Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, *Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. 2. Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother.*

A good wife, a good mother, what greater blessings can God give than these? Isaac earnestly sought to secure them for the chosen seed. He feared that Canaanite women would give bad examples both in their belief and in their lives. He saw how ill Esau had chosen. Therefore, remembering his mother whom he had greatly loved, and knowing that his own wife had come of the same family, he resolved to ally his son Jacob there. It was at God's inspiration that Isaac kept his son apart from the people of Canaan, refused to let him marry among them; he had a faith and hope which they could not share, nay, which they would soon have made him forget.

3. And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; 4. And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.

This is a prayer and a blessing too; it shows that Isaac had now fully accepted the transference of the headship and the promises from

Esau to Jacob. It had been accomplished without his knowledge and against his will, but yet it was God Who had so ordered it. Isaac committed to this dear son the great undefined glorious hope of One Who should bless the world, and the nearer promises of Canaan for a home and heritage : this was the treasure of faith, the inheritance of promise which believers passed on from one to the other ; into this communion of hope Isaac now admitted his son.

5. *And Isaac sent away Jacob : and he went to Padan-aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.*

Jacob undertook a long journey alone and on foot to visit the country of his ancestors and obtain a wife thence ; he left his parents and started off on an unknown road ; yet he carried with him God's blessing, he did not feel utterly alone. He reminds me of a missionary in Africa or America going long lonely journeys through dense forests, bearing about with him a hidden hope, a message of faith, looking out for kindred hearts who may be led to share his worship and life.

6. *When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padan-aram, to take him a wife from thence ; and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan ;* 7. *And that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padan-aram ;* 8. *And Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father ;*

Esau did not look deep enough ; he saw that his brother had gained the blessing and he had lost it ; but he attributed this to his own disobedience in having married Canaanite wives contrary to his parents' wish, while Jacob had readily obeyed their bidding. All this, he thought, could be remedied now by making another alliance more after their mind, and then all would be as before ; he forgot his own recklessness, which had despised and flung away irremediably the treasure that he had been born to.

9. *Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife.*

This step could not mend what he had done amiss. Mahalath was doubtless different from the Canaanite wives in her regard for Abraham's memory, in her faith in the one True God ; but Esau's household was only the more divided. He did not restore himself thus to the peace of God's children, or the unity of heart and uprightness of life which Abraham had cherished and taught.

10. *And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran.*

So Thou, Divine Lord, didst quit Thy heavenly home, didst journey through the rough paths of this world, didst become poor, laying aside all Thy state, didst take our infirmities and miseries in exchange for Thy glory, didst come to seek our love and win our heart. Jacob in his lonely journey reminds me of Thee.

11. *And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set ; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.*

Jacob felt solitary ; his home was left far behind ; he was without protection in an unsettled world ; he may have thought that his father's God beheld him no more, cared no more for him now that he had left the family tents. How many young men and women, starting in life amidst strangers, have had these same doubts and fears, have felt it hard to continue their childhood's prayers or believe that a Divine Friend was nigh them ! How shall they persevere in right ? how find comfort and strength ? It is to meet questionings like these that the glorious Vision of this chapter is recorded.

12. *And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven : and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.*

Behold on the lonely hillside a stair leading to heaven ; behold in the dark night bright forms passing up and down in continual communication between heaven and earth. This Vision is like that in Bethlehem field, where the shepherds found the dark night brightened and cheered by a Christmas message. It is true, then, O my God, that the unseen world is ever near, that my wants, my tears, are known above, that Thy mercies are ever descending to me. My nothingness is precious in Thy sight ; Thy angels watch over me, Thy Providence cares for me. These thoughts transfigure the dark earth and make it the outer court of Heaven.

13. *And behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac : the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed ;*

Here is a heavenly Father revealed, now that Jacob is away from his earthly father's care ; now that other friends are absent here is

a gracious countenance shining on him in love. It is thus that God would be found by those who are starting in life. They were dedicated to their father's God, now He becomes theirs; they trust in His promises, feel His blessing, are cheered by religious comforts and encouragements to begin their life's work with cheerful obedience. God tells them He will bless their efforts, make His promises for them come true.

14. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

O wealth of blessings which had been declared first to Abraham, then to Isaac, and are now poured forth for Jacob, blessings which could not be accomplished till long after those patriarchs had passed away from this world. Yet, though their bodies had long turned to dust they would not wholly miss their share; they would welcome their Divine Descendant Who brings the universal blessing; without Him Gentiles would not know of the blessing or regard Jacob's memory. It is in Christ that we inherit the true Canaan, win a company of worshippers for God from all nations, obtain blessing instead of the wrath we have deserved.

15. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

What have I done, Great God, to deserve Thy favour? what have I contributed to this alliance that Thou shouldest give me health and peace, a sense of Thy Presence, an experience of Thy goodness? Nay, it is all of Thee, my deservings are nought; when I read this gracious promise of a Divine Guardian ever near, and see how things temporal are thus made to lead on gently into a better country, an everlasting peace, the vision of God for ever, I confess that I am amazed at God's mercy; yet He bids me trust Him without fail.

16. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.

God is here to protect Jacob and receive his worship; God's merciful eye looks on him; God's promises are renewed and confirmed to him: all that he had been taught at home is true. O gracious Vision! then I must not sin, because God's eye beholds me; then

I must not despair, because His hand restrains me. I have awoke now to the truth ; my eyes are opened to see the invisible, to recognise God's unseen armies set for my guard. Only let me not lose this sense of God's Presence ; to retain that is worth to me more than rich treasures.

17. *And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*

Let me, Lord, retain a reverence for Thy Presence, Thy House, Thy Word ; keep me in holy fear ; let me beware of careless familiarity with, or indifference to, sacred things. God, Who is always near, has yet chosen certain places, certain days, certain occasions, to manifest Himself ; His wisdom has so ordered it, and I will cheerfully fall in with His appointment. I will enter God's house seriously, behave there devoutly, come to His altar with humble adoration, observe His holy seasons as they come round ; this is my wisdom and my choice, and if the world scoff, why, I know of One higher than they, Whose approval is more to me than theirs.

18. *And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.*

This was to revive and preserve the impression he had gained ; this was to consecrate a little sanctuary to which his soul might hereafter retire and be again in God's Presence, see again the golden stair and heavenly messengers. He found it salutary to note the place and occasion of the Vision. I too remember with gratitude the places where I have found God near, the saints by whom He has spoken to me, the occasions of comfort and of peace which He has sent ; as long as memory lasts, I would preserve these with gratitude.

19. *And he called the name of that place Beth-el : but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.*

Let the church I attend, or the place where I habitually say my prayers, be to me a Bethel, or House of God. It is to others a mere building of brick or stone, an ordinary room or corner, but there I have opened my heart to my Divine Lord ; He has heard my vows and given me an answer. I have found it of extreme importance to preserve a special place to say my prayers in, and to keep my times for saying them free and distinct from all other duties. Thus Luz becomes Bethel, the profane melts away before what is sacred, common days and hours are illuminated by a ray of heavenly light.

20. *And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,* 21. *So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God:*

This is the first point in Jacob's vow, 'then shall the Lord be my God.' He means, I will not be ashamed to be known as God's worshipper, I will not share in the worship of idols, I will proclaim and trust in His Providence. Let me too make this promise, I will be a worshipper of the one True God revealed in Christ Jesus. Wherever I am I will never be ashamed of this profession. I do not ask great things of Him, but merely what is sufficient for soul and body, and even for that I trust, but do not presume; He knows best how to provide for me.

22. *And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.*

Here are the second and third points in Jacob's vow. He will respect the place of the Vision, worship there, treat it as holy ground because of the grace he had there received. And, lastly, he will devote to God's service a tenth of all his earnings, will make God share in his riches, whatever they be. Here are the three points of the vow summed up: 'The Lord is my God'; 'Bethel is His house'; 'a tenth of all my profits are His.' O God, Who didst put this vow into Jacob's heart and enable him to fulfil it, let me vow to Thee what good works and duties I owe, and watch carefully over the performance of them. I look to Thee alone, not to my own strong hand or quick brain for success, for peace, for joy.

CHAPTER XXIX

1. Jacob cometh to the well of Haran. 9. He taketh acquaintance of Rachel. 13. Laban entertaineth him. 18. Jacob covenanteth for Rachel. 23. He is deceived with Leah. 28. He marrieth also Rachel, and serveth for her seven years more. 32. Leah beareth Reuben, 33. Simeon, 34. Levi, 35. and Judah.

THEN *Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east.*

He journeyed on, cheered and encouraged by the Vision seen at Bethel; he had learnt the lesson of God's Presence and Providence—though alone, he was not alone—and the long journey was

cheered by solemn and hopeful thoughts. Jacob had no long train of servants, nor camels loaded with presents; no, he represents to us a Christian who remembers that this life is but a journey, and that he will soon be at home; reason therefore for not entangling himself with a great burden of earthly goods and affairs, reason for not setting his heart too closely on anything here. Are we not strangers and sojourners, swiftly passing through this life to our eternal home? Will not God soon bring us there, and care for us till we get there?

2. *And he looked, and behold a well in the field, and lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and a great stone was upon the well's mouth.* 3. *And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place.*

This was not the well by the city, with the steps of stone, down which Rebekah had gone carrying the pitcher. No, this was a well far out in the fields, and it was so precious as to be closed with a huge stone which was only stirred by the united strength of many shepherds; this was in order to protect the precious life-giving stream and save it from defilement or waste. But I who read am reminded of that great stone which closed the mouth of the sepulchre where the true Spring of all life lay hid. His friends pondered over that great stone and wondered who should roll it away for them, but they found it rolled away and a fresh tide of grace coming forth to the world.

4. *And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence be ye? And they said, Of Haran are we.* 5. *And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him.* 6. *And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep.*

Jacob addressed the shepherds as brethren, and asked them after Laban and his welfare. 'Is it peace with him?' is the literal meaning of his question. 'Peace,' they replied. This is the custom of the sacred language which speaks of peace, where other languages speak only of health or prosperity. So Jesus bade His disciples say, 'Peace be to this house,' spoke of a 'son of peace,' left His own peace with His friends. O my God, let my welfare be this, not mere robustness of health or fulness of purse, but true inward peace with Thee, and, if it may be so, with other men who are my brethren and Thy creatures!

7. *And he said, Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together: water ye the sheep, and go and feed them.* 8. *And they said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep.*

Jacob was evidently a good shepherd—he lamented that the sheep should be kept thirsty and hungry; he did not agree with the excuses the shepherds of Haran offered for their neglect of the flocks. Does he not suggest to us that Good Shepherd, Who, when He came, ‘had compassion on the multitude because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep that had no shepherd’? (St. Matt. ix. 36). Jacob forgets his own matters in his care for the sheep; he is not satisfied with the indifference of those with whom he converses.

9. *And while he yet spake to them, Rachel came with her father's sheep: for she kept them.* 10. *And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.* 11. *And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept.*

Jacob had been guided in his long journey, Rachel in her shepherding, so as to meet at this well, at this time. God designed their lifelong love to begin here. She was one who was not afraid of labour or hardship, who devoted herself to the tasks which came to her to do; and the sight of her inspired Jacob with strength to roll away the stone and release the needed water. He is like that Good Shepherd Who sat by Jacob's own well long afterwards and offered to the Samaritan woman a draught of living and refreshing water.

12. *And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father.*

Certainly there is a remarkable contrast between the circumstances of Eliezer's visit to seek Rebekah for Isaac, and Jacob's when he comes to choose a wife for himself. The former is attended by a long train, displays gold, offers presents at once, has great store of rich gifts with him, while Jacob has nothing but his own love to recommend him. Yet true love cannot mistake him. He is no messenger, but the spouse himself; he speaks to the heart of his future bride. So Christ does with those that are worthy of His

love. It is the Lord Himself, His own mercy, wisdom, excellence, that is dear to Christian hearts; they recognise Him and return His love.

13. *And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things.* 14. *And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month.*

How gracious is Laban's first welcome, how tender his words, and yet they hid a grasping, covetous heart! I do not think Jacob told Laban about the vision at Bethel or the mysterious promised blessing. No, probably he confined himself to news of the journey and particulars about Isaac and Rebekah. He and Laban were kindred indeed by flesh and blood; but Jacob had prayers and hopes deep in his heart which Laban took no thought of.

15. *And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?* 16. *And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.* 17. *Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured.* 18. *And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.*

Jacob appears in 'the form of a servant'; he says nothing for a month of his love or his hopes. When he does, it is to bind himself to seven years' hard service before he wins his bride. To find her he had left his father's home and come to sojourn among strangers; yet he is willing to win her by labour and humiliation. He shadows forth thus the true Bridegroom of our souls.

19. *And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me.* 20. *And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.*

Laban, who was covetous, grasped the opportunity of giving his daughter in marriage without providing a dowry as he should have done (xxxi. 15). Also, he saw the value of Jacob's services, and willingly employed him at so cheap a rate. But Jacob heartily

embraced the bargain ; Rachel was so dear to him that he counted no time or labour wasted that would bring her to his arms ; thoughts of her love sweetened all his toil. Let those, dear Lord, who call themselves shepherds of souls, and are set apart to serve Thee in the sacred ministry, remember Jacob and set themselves to win souls ; let them not seek high place, or wealth, or authority in the Church, or an easy reposeful life, but regard only Christ's people and live for them. Such labour is abundantly blessed and rewarded.

21. And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go unto her.

So spake the true Jacob when His hour drew near. 'My time,' said He, 'is at hand.' He 'knew that the hour was come.' All the actions and sufferings of His Divine Life had been leading up to it. He had come to win us by all His toils, and by laying down His own life. He invited believers to love and trust Him with a perfect heart and become His for ever. Who else is worthy of all their love ?

22. And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast.

A wedding feast often becomes in Scripture the figure of union with God. The king 'would make a marriage for his son' ; 'the friend of the bridegroom' negotiates the union ; 'the Bridegroom cometh' and they who are ready enter in ; the wedding feast is spread, and the wedding garment expected to be worn ; 'the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife hath made herself ready.' All the glory, the tenderness, the hopes of an earthly union (indeed here they are often all mixed with earthly dust or turned into disappointment) shadow forth something deeper, to which our hearts gradually draw near, which God enables them by degrees to comprehend.

23. And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him ; and he went in unto her. 24. And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid. 25. And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah : and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me ? did not I serve with thee for Rachel ? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me ?

Here is a cruel deception that mocked the bridegroom's hopes. It must have reminded Jacob how he had himself deceived his father.

It may happen that in marriage we are disappointed; we find that the loved one cannot fulfil our expectations—

‘The brightest and the happiest pair
Will find occasions to forbear,
And something every day they live
To pity, or perhaps forgive.’

So is God’s will, that husband or wife should by patience, prayer, and the teaching of life’s experience, turn Leah into Rachel, that is, discord into love.

26. And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27. Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. 28. And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also. 29. And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.

Laban thought of nothing but how to get his daughter off his hands without paying any dowry, and to secure Jacob’s services without pay; but Jacob submitted with patience to the deceit and grasping of his uncle, guided perhaps by the thought of an overruling Divine Providence which was bringing good out of mischief. Such a union as this with two sisters at once was afterwards forbidden by the law (Lev. xviii. 18), as polygamy itself was by the Gospel, but the times as yet permitted it. Christian writers have been wont to see figured in these two wives, Leah and Rachel, as in Christ’s holy friends, Martha and Mary, the two sorts of life which believers have to lead. Leah signifies the business, the care, the grief, the disappointments that belong to one who works for his brethren’s good; Rachel the tranquil joy and heavenly peace of meditation on Divine things. Yet it is not allowed to us to seek the delights of that peaceful and untroubled contemplation, till we have first given ourselves with zeal to the good works which God lays on us to do, even though they may involve us in much toil and care.

30. And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years. 31. And when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.

Following out the figurative allusion hinted at under the last verse, we notice that Leah brings children to Jacob. He is consoled for his disappointment in her unloved society by the hopeful children whom she bears him. So it is that in active duties, in teaching,

in ministering, in attending to the souls and bodies of our brethren, God grants to us infinite joys and comforts; those we benefit become to us as our own, their joys are ours. In their gratitude we find an abundant recompense for the time we have taken from our own peace and quiet.

32. And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me.

Leah's first boy was called Reuben, which means 'Behold, a son.' 'God hath beheld me,' she said; 'He has seen that I have no charms of my own, no power to win a husband's love, and, therefore, as I had nought of my own to trust to, He showed His gracious care for me.' She reminds us in this verse of a greater and holier Mother marvelling that God 'has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.'

33. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the Lord hath heard that I was hated, He hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon.

This son is called Simeon, which means 'hearing.' 'God has heard that I am hated, and this son is the fruit of His consoling goodness to me.' Not otherwise does a Christian represent to God his own vileness, his own wretchedness and unworthiness, as a very plea for mercy. I am indeed, O Lord, worthy only of Thy wrath, but yet Thy love is greater.

34. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi.

This son's name signifies 'union' or 'attachment.' So will her husband's heart be hers, so will he be joined to her, not only by literal outward marriage but by union of heart and feeling. It is this that she covets—she longs for that heart which had never been hers—all her desire is to win her husband's love.

35. And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the Lord: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing.

This fourth son is Judah, or 'praise.' At the birth of each child Leah thinks of God as the giver of the precious gift. Their very names serve to remind her of Divine Mercy. What else do Christian

mothers when they bring their children to God's House to be blessed in His Name, signed with His Cross, declared to belong to His flock? They learn to trust God with their children's welfare, to bring them up from their earliest years to know and love a heavenly Father.

CHAPTER XXX

1. Rachel, in grief for her barrenness, giveth Bilhah her maid unto Jacob. 5. She beareth Dan and Naphtali. 9. Leah giveth Zilpah her maid, who beareth Gad and Asher. 14. Reuben findeth mandrakes, with which Leah buyeth her husband of Rachel. 17. Leah beareth Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah. 22. Rachel beareth Joseph. 25. Jacob desireth to depart. 27. Laban stayeth him on a new covenant. 37. Jacob's policy, whereby he became rich.

AND *when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.*

Rachel's grief at not being a mother is like the great Apostle's longing to multiply his spiritual children; that is all his desire—he 'endures all things for the elect's sake'; he lives only to travail of souls. For her, her husband's love, which she possessed entirely, was not enough to satisfy her. No, nor is the vision of Truth, the comfort of prayer, enough for an earnest heart unless other souls are new born by grace to share it. The heart cries out for such fellowship, it cannot endure to be alone in believing.

2. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, Who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?

God alone could bless the marriage bed and make it fruitful of dear children. It is God too Who gives us the spiritual offspring for which we crave. Do not think that your own eloquence, your own devotion, can plant faith in one heart.

'There was a place, there was a time,
Whether by night or day,
God's Spirit came and left that gift,
Then passed upon His way.'

3. And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. 4. And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid

to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. 5. And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son.

Slaves thus assist in building up the house of Israel for which God had such great designs. Yet it was Rachel, the free and dearly beloved wife, who adopted the servile offspring as her own and so made them free. Her desire was that the race of Abraham should multiply, and for this she was content to yield up her own rights to another. She figures to us the Church of God, which is increased by the ministry even of servile, unwilling, disloyal priests, but it is the true Church of God which receives and welcomes the increase.

6. And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan.

This name means 'judgment' or 'vindication.' 'God,' she said, 'has shown Himself on my side, maintained my cause, rescued me from undeserved contempt.' Rachel took the motherhood of her slave as a token for herself. 'This is,' she said, 'a proof that it was not for my fault that I am barren. Here is a merciful sign of God's protecting care over me.'

7. And Bilhah Rachel's maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son. 8. And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali.

This name means 'wrestling'; she had struggled for a blessing, had won it only after long endurance; it was the fruit of her prayers. She was content to see her slave in her husband's arms, so long as she could win a child thus which should be reckoned as her own. She resembles the Apostle when he says, 'Some preach Christ even of envy and strife,' or 'supposing to add affliction to my bonds,' and declares, 'but I rejoice therein, yea, and will rejoice.' So long as souls were born to Christ, St. Paul's great heart was content to put up with any opprobrium that might fall on himself.

9. When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her to Jacob to wife. 10. And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a son. 11. And Leah said, A troop cometh: and she called his name Gad.

The name of this son of Zilpah is here explained as 'a troop'; this son made up Leah's family into a band or army; but it may be

also rendered 'fortunate,' as expressing her happiness in her servant's fruitfulness. Leah earnestly desired more children, both as establishing a claim on her husband's heart and as providing for the future-glory of that family to which the promises had been given, and which she knew would spread into a mighty nation.

12. *And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a second son.*
 13. *And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed: and she called his name Asher.*

This son's name expressed 'happiness.' Leah rejoiced that she had so many sons, both her own and adopted by her. This made up to her for her husband's indifference. Jacob, indeed, had desired but one wife, had but one in heart, though fraud and custom had arranged his life otherwise. All his mature life he loved Rachel, and when she was dead, cared for her children above all his family, and remembered her grave. None else could be to him what she was. Taking his life as representing a Christian's course, his union with Leah figures the busy stirring life of works of mercy, fruitful in good, but all the time his heart belongs to Rachel, or heavenly contemplation, which he loves best.

14. *And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes.* 15. *And she said unto her, Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband? and wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also? And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee to-night for thy son's mandrakes.* 16. *And Jacob came out of the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night.*

This fruit, called also love-apple, was thought to promote fertility; therefore it was that Rachel craved for it, and to obtain it parted with her husband's embraces for a while. In all this history those who look only to the letter of Scripture see but an account of polygamy and the jealousies arising from a man's possessing many wives, and they regard all this as contemptible; but the reality lies deeper. Jacob was not merely swayed by fancy or his wives by jealousy. That a man should have more wives than one was, in those days, permitted by God, and was consistent with holy living and mutual regard. This household was a holy one, and in it were figured mysteries to come.

17. *And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son.* 18. *And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband: and she called his name Issachar.*

This name meant 'pay' or 'reward.' Leah took this son's birth as an answer to her prayers, and a compensation for her sacrifice on parting with her husband to her servant. It was not that she rejoiced over her sister's barrenness, but that the affection of her sons proved to her she was not forsaken of God or man.

19. *And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son.* 20. *And Leah said, God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun.*

This son's name signifies 'dwelling'. She had no beauty of her own, no dowry of her own, for which her husband should esteem her; but she trusted that her children should make her dear and precious to him, so that he would not forsake her. Certainly Leah counted herself for nothing, she regarded her children as her only claim to favour. She reminds us of him who said to his spiritual children, 'Ye are my glory, my joy, my crown of rejoicing.'

21. *And afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah.*

This is the only one of Jacob's daughters (for he had several, as we see from xxxvii. 35) who is mentioned by name, and this only because the history of her downfall and its consequences has to be told in xxxiv. Her beauty was no doubt far superior to her mother's; but it would seem that she lacked prudence, and went into doubtful company. Anyhow, what we are told of her speaks of warning rather than of blessing.

22. *And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.* 23. *And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach:*

Here is Rachel's son born at last to take away her inferiority. He is so longed for, so precious to his parents, and becomes in after days so great and famous. Though a younger son, he attained greater honour than his brothers, became the saviour of the whole family, left a name for peace, purity, and wisdom behind him. Was not this son worth more than all the rest? He seems to figure to us that Divine Son—born after long waiting—Who took away our stains, raised us up from the earth, brought us healing and peace.

24. *And she called his name Joseph ; and said, The Lord shall add to me another son.*

His mother regarded him as the precursor of other offspring to come, and gave him a name which signified 'increase.' So Christ's own birth of Mary was followed by the new birth of innumerable souls to God through Him. With Joseph's birth Jacob's years of service came to an end : he has finished his doubled seven years of bondage, and now feels that he is free.

25. *And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.* 26. *Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go : for thou knowest my service which I have done thee.*

In Jacob's words, when he was thinking of his home and desiring to gather together those souls that were his and lead them back thither, I hear the voice of the Son of God searching for His elect, and saying, 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings !' The Good Shepherd sought to rescue His own from the bondage of the world and of the Law, and in spite of all resistance He won them and took them with Him.

27. *And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry : for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.* 28. *And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it.*

Laban recognises Jacob's worth, and observes that God's blessing comes upon all that he does. So long as Jacob was willing to remain and work on, Laban had not greatly cared to acknowledge or reward his labours. Let me, Lord, have eyes to discern Thy servants while they are with me, and to recognise that the blessings I enjoy are the fruit of their prayers and love. I who am unworthy have been infinitely helped and blessed by the presence of good Christians, in whose mercies I have shared.

29. *And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me.* 30. *For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude ; and the Lord hath blessed thee since my coming : and now when shall I provide for mine own house also ?*

Here we seem to hear Samuel vindicating his uprightness in judging Israel, or the great Apostle reminding his brethren of all his

tears and toils. The latter says to his Ephesian converts, 'Ye yourselves know after what manner I have been with you all the time, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations.' He tells 'how, by the space of three years, I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears.' He bids them in turn take heed to the flock over which God had set them—that precious flock bought with a Divine price—and he, like Jacob, attributes all increase to the blessing of God, 'Who is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.'

31. *And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock.* 32. *I will pass through all thy flock to-day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire.* 33. *So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the sheep, that shall be counted stolen with me.* 34. *And Laban said, Behold, I would it might be according to thy word.*

It is apparently a very small wage for which Jacob stipulates, for in that country, it is said, very few sheep are black, very few goats spotted with white; and even of that little, Laban, while outwardly consenting, determines to deprive him, if possible. Jacob was to have all that was strange or unusual in appearance among the flock. At first, all the cattle—Laban's and Jacob's—seemed blended indistinguishably together; but a day would come when a difference would be made—a day when those who belonged to the good shepherd should be known and claimed by him. In this transitory confusion, to be followed by a lasting separation, do we not discern a figure of mysteries to come?

35. *And he removed that day the he-goats that were ring-straked and spotted, and all the she-goats that were speckled and spotted, and every one that had some white in it, and all the brown among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons.* 36. *And he set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob: and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.*

Laban was determined that there should be no chance of augmenting Jacob's share, and so was willing to deprive a great part of the

flocks of Jacob's guardianship, which he had just professed to value so highly. He carefully withdrew from him all the speckled and spotted goats, all the speckled or black sheep, and set them out of Jacob's reach, leaving him only those of one colour—the light sheep or the dark goats—those from whom he hoped no unusually coloured offspring would come, so that his son-in-law might get the worst of the arrangement.

37. And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chesnut tree ; and pilled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods. 38. And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should conceive when they came to drink. 39. And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle ringstraked, speckled, and spotted. 40. And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstraked, and all the brown in the flock of Laban ; and he put his own flocks by themselves, and put them not unto Laban's cattle.

This device of Jacob's, to produce coloured and striped cattle, by having the striped rods exposed before the eyes of the females at the water-troughs, and its success in producing the kind of young that he required, could not have continued long ; for as soon as Laban became aware of it, he changed Jacob's wages, and this time after time (xxx. 7 and 41). Still, whatever he arranged, all turned out for Jacob's interest : his share, of whatever kind it was, was a good one. God recompensed him for his long labour—remembered His own promises towards him. It was God's overruling power, not Jacob's craft, that gave him wealth.

41. And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the cattle in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods. 42. But when the cattle were feeble, he put them not in : so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's.

This was how Jacob's flock began, and it grew up stronger and healthier than all Laban's cattle. It was no choice of the sheep themselves that gave them one temperament or another, one master or another ; they were so constituted or disposed according to God's natural Providence or men's arrangement. True, and so it is in the Lord's flock, with weaker or stronger souls, with those who fail or who persevere. Our spiritual constitution is various according to nature or circumstance ; our chances vary exceedingly. Yet, dear

Lord, I am Thy sheep, Thou art my Shepherd. Thou speakest to and pleadest with me, as if there was no other soul for whom Thou didst die. My weakness is not able to weary out Thy love.

43. *And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maid-servants, and men-servants, and camels, and asses.*

This is different from his entry into Padan-Aram, when he had but his staff. He felt now that God had cared for him, turned all things to his good. Yet I, instructed by Gospel teaching, know that when we are poor, sick, unfortunate, we are no less protected and guided than in prosperity. I will not complain that God has forsaken me, though I am stripped of the world's goods or hopes. He is my true Riches, my abiding Friend.

CHAPTER XXXI

1. Jacob upon displeasure departeth secretly. 19. Rachel stealeth her father's images. 22. Laban pursueth after him, 26. and complaineth of the wrong. 34. Rachel's policy to hide the images. 36. Jacob's complaint of Laban. 43. The covenant of Laban and Jacob at Galeed.

AND he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. 2. And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and behold, it was not toward him as before.

Then nothing had succeeded with Laban since he withdrew his flock from Jacob's care and set himself to counteract Jacob's prospering. All his schemes had been frustrated, and Jacob saw in his growing alienation great danger for himself. Envy and hatred were visible on Laban's face when they met. Now Jacob was not actually that Good Shepherd Who was to lay down His life for the sheep—no, only a shadow and figure of Him. Jacob's duty was not to offer his life to man's hatred, but to flee from it. He had, too, a sense deep within, that his future and his hopes were to be accomplished in Palestine, that his home lay there.

3. *And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.*

O gracious promise, truly fulfilled! Not only outward warnings of danger but an inward voice of guidance encouraged Jacob to start

for his old home. Fresh dangers might await him there from his brother's resentment, but yet God promised to be with him still. What ! dangers there as well as here ? Yes ; so it is on this earth ; wherever we go, there is risk, peril, temptation. But yet the faithful soul says : ' Mine eyes are ever looking unto the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net. I change from one peril to another, but my God is unchanged.'

4. *And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock,* 5. *And said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before ; but the God of my father hath been with me.*

' Your father,' Jacob said, ' is now no father to me. No ; he hates me and would harm me. My father, Isaac, is far off and powerless to help, but my Heavenly Father does not forget me. He is my childhood's God and well known to me by the experience of a life spent under His shadow, and enjoying His mercy.' As Jacob's wives listened to him they were strengthened and guided to trust in this unseen merciful heavenly Friend of Whom their husband had told them.

6. *And ye know that with all my power I have served your father.* 7. *And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times ; but God suffered him not to hurt me.* 8. *If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages ; then all the cattle bare speckled : and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire ; then bare all the cattle ringstraked.* 9. *Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me.*

God's blessing had had more effect than Laban's ill-will. God's wisdom and providence, not Jacob's own craft, had wrought out his fortunes. ' I am not the author of all this wealth,' said Jacob, ' it is God's gift to me, a sign of His vindication of my uprightness. God has stood my Friend when men were against me. Shall not we (his argument was) obey and trust in this Divine protecting and merciful One ?'

10. *And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle were ringstraked, speckled, and grisled.* 11. *And the Angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob : And I said, Here am I.* 12. *And*

He said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grisled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee.

Our patience, our wrongs, our courage are witnessed by God. He knows all that we have to bear. He disposes the operations of nature, the instinct of beasts, the passions of men to work out His wise ends. Those who commit their way unto Him will find out this at last, will see in all their ways a gracious overshadowing love.

13. I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.

God reminds Jacob of the former vision and the feelings which he had had then. God makes Bethel and its recollections revive in his mind after so many years. Glory to God for recalling to me the feelings I had at the time of my conversion! How fervently I prayed then, how generously I promised, how richly God's mercy came home to my heart! I would fain feel now as I felt then. Oh that I kept better in mind what I promised then! Let me at least make up my mind to obey God now, and that promptly and cheerfully.

14. And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15. Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money. 16. For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that is ours, and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do.

Here we see fulfilled what the Psalmist sang of when he said: 'Hearken, O daughter, and consider, incline thine ear: forget also thine own people and thy father's house.' Here is what the image of the fruitless leafy fig-tree, withered up by Christ, represents. Here we see the Christian Church, which Christ has espoused to Himself, leaving her Jewish home, where all had now become poor and unprofitable,—sacrifices without power to cleanse, a priesthood that had lost its right to bless, a law that had become only a burden,—leaving all this and passing to a new standpoint which her Heavenly Bridegroom had designed for her.

17. Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels; 18. And he carried away all his cattle, and all his

goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padan-aram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan.

So, more than one hundred years before, had Abraham gone that same journey, at the bidding of the same God. But Abraham 'went forth, not knowing whither he went'; while Jacob was returning to the home of his childhood, the land where he had received Divine promises. This journey reminds us of yet another Exodus, when Jacob's descendants came out from 'the house of bondage' and set their faces towards Canaan, carrying with them Egyptian spoil and Egyptian wisdom. How great a spell had Canaan to win hearts back thither! They could not abide elsewhere. Their true home claimed them.

19. And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's. 20. And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled.

Laban at his shearing feast relaxed his covetous anxiety and rejoiced to think he was not so poor after all, when in the midst of his mirth he heard of Jacob's departure and the gods being stolen who were (as he thought) the givers of good luck to his house. Laban's religion was of a mixed sort, like his conduct. He worshipped the true God and yet looked for a blessing to the images which his household venerated. He had impulses of generosity as well as of covetousness. He represents the followers of this world, who are uneasy and vexed at seeing God's children withdraw themselves from among them and take a line of their own. Give me, Lord, grace to pass the river and set my face heavenwards without regarding the snares, the threats, the persuasions with which men would hinder my journey.

21. So he fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face toward the mount Gilead.

Here are the chosen family finally crossing Euphrates and setting their faces towards Canaan. It was more than a thousand years before Jacob's descendants passed on this road again; that was when the Captivity came, and they had to tread back this very road and recross the great river with sadness and tears; yet their God was with them still, and they were able to pray to Him 'by the waters of Babylon.' Euphrates, which once flowed by the happy garden and witnessed the unfallen state of man, still flows on, though bondage and sorrow and desolation line its banks now.

22. *And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled.* 23. *And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead.*

Why did Laban take trouble to set on foot all this hot pursuit? Indeed, he had not taken pleasure in Jacob's society when he had him; it would seem that he could not bear to live with Jacob, nor yet to let him go. He liked to have him at his beck and call and arrange his life for him. That Jacob should go back to serve his own God in his own land in independence seemed to Laban a thing intolerable and offensive to his own dignity.

24. *And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.*

This great Vision changed not so much Laban's heart as his behaviour; he dared not now ill-use or revile Jacob. God, Who had inspired Jacob to flee homewards, and had promised to protect him, fulfilled His promise by chiding Laban's fierce heart and warning him against taking vengeance. Do Thou, Lord, in mercy interfere and save me from myself. Speak to me when I am tempted to hasty passion and check any sharp word or unkind act.

25. *Then Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount: and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mount of Gilead.*

All seemed to portend a fight, and Jacob's family fully expected their ruin to ensue, but their unseen Divine Protector was at hand to turn all things to a good end. He allows us to be destitute of earthly succour on purpose to awaken our faith in Himself. He bids us cheerfully resign ourselves into His Divine Hands Who cares for us. I can see no chance for myself, no way of escape, no resources on which to rely, then let me the rather trust in a Friend Who is 'full of kindness, full of care, full of power.'

26. *And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword?* 27. *Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp?* 28. *And hast*

not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? thou hast now done foolishly in so doing.

Laban appears, more than all, to be vexed because his dignity had not been consulted. This ceremonial departure would have added little to Jacob's comfort or happiness. When warnings, revelations, the attractions of home, the sanctity of the Holy Land, all joined to bid him start and fly without looking back, what mattered more or less of splendour and elegance about his movements? That he should go, and go at once, was the matter of supreme importance. Let me lay to heart this lesson, and not mind if the men of this world scoff at the method of my moving heavenward, so I get there.

29. It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.

30. And now, though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?

Laban saw that there was a difference between a God who could speak and gods who were but dumb idols; why did he not learn from Jacob how to fear the Living and True God, so that a common faith and worship might have linked him and his son-in-law closely together? Laban had not wholly cast off faith in God, but yet looked superstitiously for prosperity to these images which were set up in his house; what protection can idols bring who cannot protect themselves?

31. And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me. 32. With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.

Jacob thought, and with good reason, that Laban meant to keep him in perpetual bondage, or at least to claim his wives and children and goods and leave him helpless and ruined. That was why he fled; he longed for home, freedom, and security, but he had never agreed to plundering Laban of his false gods; that was not Jacob's way of teaching the service of the true God; he knew that idolatry is rooted in the heart, and cannot be eradicated merely by the disappearance of a sacred image. O Lord, may I have a right sense of, and a love for, Thee Who art Living and True; then no idols or deceits can ensnare me, nothing can rob me of Thy Presence.

33. *And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the two maidservants' tents; but he found them not. Then went he out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. 34. Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not. 35. And she said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not the images.*

So these precious idols have to be ignominiously stuffed among the baggage and used as a seat by a suffering woman; they have lost all their venerableness. Was it not thus with Jewish customs and ceremonies after the Gospel came? By no direct enactment, but by the force of Gospel teaching, the glory of Gospel Revelation, they lost their old meaning, and became first burdensome, then pernicious to faith. God showed His plain intention to withdraw those ceremonies from the observance of Christians.

36. *And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? 37. Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both.*

So Jews would tell us that we have robbed them of their sacred things, that the Old Testament, the use of Psalms in worship, the practice of keeping the Ten Commandments, the kingdom of Christ, the message of Faith in one True God, are all theirs; that we have only despoiled them of their own. But our account is that all this is rightfully ours; the promise of Messiah, the covenant of grace, the law of duty, are all long previous to Moses; the Prophets and the Psalms speak of the hopes of humanity, the yearning of true hearts in all lands for peace and truth. All these things are ours who believe in Christ Jesus; we have stolen nothing, for we are the heirs of the ages, and God designed for us His fullest Revelation, which should embrace all the rest.

38. *This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. 39. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night.*

40. *Thus I was ; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night ; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.*

This is the Eastern good shepherd. No less, in our cold northern climes, the shepherd's dangers, cares, and toils abound, though of a different sort. Here, the sounds of winter storm

'Are warnings which the shepherd ask
To dismal and to dangerous task.'

He has to go forth in the snow to seek and guide his sheep ; he bears the fierce blast uncomplaining.

'If fails his heart, if his limbs fail,
Benumbing death is in the gale.'

May the remembrance of the fierce heat, the parching frost, the drenching storms which shepherds have to bear, the thought of their long toils, their patient searches, reprove the sloth, the indifference, the self-indulgence which I, O Lord, have shown in Thy service ! Why was it Thou gavest me charge of Thy sheep ?

41. *Thus have I been twenty years in thy house ; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle : and thou hast changed my wages ten times.*

Rebekah was granted at once at the prayer of Isaac's messenger, but Rachel and Leah were won by fourteen years' service, and the cattle by hard perseverance and God's good Providence, not by any liberality or faithfulness on Laban's part. O good lesson of patience ! what is worth winning that can be won without this virtue ? From men we may expect plenty of malice or ingratitude, but from our God forbearance and help always ; we cannot wear out His goodness.

42. *Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.*

O God of Abraham, O Fear of Isaac, O Friend of Jacob, may I have those sentiments of love and fear towards Thee which are fitting for a creature ! I look to Thee as my Creator and Governor ; I tremble at the mysteries which encompass me round ; I have reason to distrust my own frailty, but I have a firm confidence in Thy encompassing Love ; all the promises of the Gospel encourage me to trust and hope. Thou knowest all my needs, all my anxieties.

43. *And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine : and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have borne ?* 44. *Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou ; and let it be for a witness between me and thee.*

O wonder ! here is Laban's wrath all changed to love, his jealousy into perfect concord ; here is peace come instead of war. What hand could accomplish this but that of the Disposer of hearts ? And is there not here a figure of that good day to come when God shall break down the division between Jews and Christians, shall unite them in one covenant and one worship, shall do away with the unbelief and suspicion that keeps them separate now ? That will be a day of joy indeed that shall unite the heart of the fathers to their children and the heart of the children to their fathers.

45. *And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar.* 46. *And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones ; and they took stones, and made an heap : and they did eat there upon the heap.* 47. *And Laban called it Jegar-saha-dutha : but Jacob called it Galeed.* 48. *And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed ;*

This heap of stones on which they sat and ate together, and which was called in both their dialects by the common name of 'the witness heap,' served both for altar and for table and for memorial. Here the two chiefs had worshipped together, here they had shared in a peaceful meal, here they had sworn friendship to each other ; this was to future ages the token of their agreement. Reading these verses we are reminded of the Apostle's words, 'To whom coming, as unto a living stone, . . . ye also, as lively stones, are built up into a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer unto God acceptable sacrifices through Jesus Christ.' He is the Foundation-stone, we the stones built on Him to make up the edifice : priests too to minister in this Temple, and brethren linked by common vows.

49. *And Mizpah ; for he said, The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.* 50. *If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us ; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee.*

Mizpah means 'watchtower.' Laban said that God would look from that vantage-ground and watch over Jacob's conduct to

Laban's daughters. Jacob would be out of the reach of an earthly judge, but God knew how to observe and to punish transgression. Let me ever remember that God watches over me for my protection and for my restraint; if I break my solemn promises, men may not know, but He knows. I may be absent from my home and those who love me, but my God is an intimate Friend, a watchful Guard.

51. *And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee; 52. This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm.*

Laban then thought that Jacob would become great; he had a sense that God's promises to Jacob would be accomplished, and he desired to provide that his own and Jacob's descendants should live at peace together. His treaty of peace anticipates the day of the Cross, which slew enmity and made peace, which made Jew and Gentile, Barbarian and Scythian, slave and free, one in Christ Jesus.

53. *The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the Fear of his father Isaac.*

No doubt Laban's meaning was to invoke the True God as known and worshipped in the family of Terah. No doubt, for the time, he forgot the idolatrous worship which he had mixed up with God's true service; but yet as Terah, and Abraham, before his call, had only known this God in dim figures and as confounded with the false deities of the people round, Jacob is careful to swear by the True and Living God Whom his father Isaac worshipped, and in Whose service he himself had been brought up. He clung fast to his faith in that God, and would never let it go.

54. *Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. 55. And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place.*

Then all this joyful and peaceful communion of hearts, which God brought about, and into which He changed the previous enmity, was not meant to be enjoyed for long. Separation ensued, and a barrier of time and distance was set up. Yes, so it is; God bids

the inquirer 'Go thy way until the end of the days. Do not seek to search too deeply into God's counsels, or fathom when He will unite again those who are severed here.' And yet His promises, His Cross, His love are sure pledges that He will do this, that the partings of those who believe and love are but for a time, and their reunion will last for ever.

CHAPTER XXXII

1. Jacob's vision at Mahanaim. 3. His message to Esau. 6. He is afraid of Esau's coming. 9. He prayeth for deliverance. 13. He sendeth a present to Esau. 24. He wrestleth with an angel at Peniel, where he is called Israel. 31. He halteth.

AND *Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

This passing glimpse of angels welcomed Jacob into his own land again, just as they had appeared to him at Bethel when he was leaving it. He was strengthened to feel that God was near him, God protected him, that hosts of enemies could not prevail over one who had God's hosts pledged to fight for him. Let me so live, so pray, so trust, that I may be blessed with the guardianship of God's holy angels, that they may help me in my prayers and sustain me in dark moments. I see them not, yet know that they are near.

3. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: 5. And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and men-servants, and women-servants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.*

'I come back to my own country in all humility after long years of exile. I do not come to beg or to strive for wealth; God has given me resources enough, so that I am able rather to bestow than seek. I do not wish to interfere with my brother's blessing or rights, those which are proper to him; all I ask is his goodwill and help.' In all this message of Jacob's I notice much courtesy, good sense, far-sightedness, but I see that he does not mean to relinquish his own covenanted blessing, the inheritance of the

future, the hope of mankind's promised Benefactor. Oh no, he would sooner die than lose that; but he keeps it to himself as a subject in which Esau could not share.

6. *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him.*

News of war—God's hosts had melted away into the intangible sky, but here are a very visible host of material enemies, ready to rush on Jacob's helpless caravan and slay or plunder at their pleasure. At this message dismay prevailed throughout Jacob's company, and he himself had to remedy matters as he could, had to devise what plans were best—above all, to take counsel with his unseen Divine Friend. So may I keep my self-possession when adverse news comes, do all that is needful, and yet lean on an unfailing Hand.

7. *Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; 8. And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.*

How was it Jacob feared so much? Had he not a Divine promise of security? Of what avail was his faith, his hope, his regard to Divine promises? I do not think that in this life trust can altogether banish fear. They may exist together in the same heart. We feel our danger, we are distressed at the power of evil, at the burden of pain, and yet the sense of this heavy weight leads us the more to do whatever can be done and confide ourselves to God's mercy for what is out of our power. O Lord, my frailty is great, my resources few, and the hosts of evil are strong. Of myself I have no strength or wisdom, and therefore I cast all upon Thee.

9. *And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord Which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: 10. I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.*

O merciful God, I have learnt from my fathers to believe in Thee. I know of Thy wonders and mercies wrought in old time. Those

who trusted in Thee have not been deceived. I have so far followed Thy guidance and found Thy promises true. Let it be so still. I return Thee humble and hearty thanks, good Lord, for Thy goodness to me in the time past, and now that fresh trials await me, let me have fresh experience of Thy goodness. Praise to Thy Holy Name for what Thou art and hast done for me !

11. *Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau : for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.*

Here is the difference between Jacob's household and the family of Laban or of Esau. Others turned to false gods with vain prayers, or relied simply on their right hand, their strength and valour. But Jacob's God is his Friend to Whom he turns, to Whom he opens his heart. It is not his wealth for which he fears, but for his dear wives and children ; he would willingly risk himself for those dear lives. Oh that I could speak to God in earnest and persuasive accents when the souls of those I love are in peril ! Oh that I could win their salvation by hearty intercession through Christ's prevailing merits !

12. *And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.*

'It is Thy promise, Lord, for which I plead ; it is Thy word that is in peril. Thou saidst, "I will multiply thy seed as sand or stars, will give thee Canaan, will cause the world's salvation to proceed from thee." It is this word of Thine which will be ruined if I and mine are destroyed. Thy choice and calling are surely not in vain. I have ventured on Thy word, and can trust Thee not to deceive me.' Such a prayer as this contains in it the assurance of an answer ; it is anchored on the firm rock of God's Truth, of His loving-kindness.

13. *And he lodged there that same night ; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother ;*
14. *Two hundred she-goats, and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams,* 15. *Thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she-asses, and ten foals.*
16. *And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves ; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove.*

Jacob knew 'that a brother offended is harder to be won than a great city,' so he laid siege to Esau's wrath and directed against it

all his battering-trains of gifts. He desired that the beauty, the curiousness, the frequent succession of his presents and the reflection that they were all for Esau himself, all to be added to his store and increase his consequence, should insensibly appease Esau's passion and turn it into complacency. It would be hard, he justly thought, for any one's anger to stand out against this method of treatment. I wish I had always taken like pains to turn away wrath and remove prejudice. That is an object well worth gaining.

17. *And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee?* 18. *Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and behold, also he is behind us.* 19. *And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him.* 20. *And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me.*

Jacob by these wise precautions won his object. He turned his brother's angry face into a face of kindness. Nor did he the less by his prayers and tears win a sight of God's Face looking graciously on him. In his early days, when he had had the vision at Bethel, God had looked on him in love from the top of the heavenly stair; but now a long series of years, trials, sins seemed to come between and dim the brightness. Happy are we who have a Heavenly Advocate with God, a Brother Who is Divine and human, Who represents our case, speaks for us when we cannot speak for ourselves.

21. *So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company.* 22. *And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two women-servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok.* 23. *And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.*

This was the crisis of Jacob's life, the time of his greatest anxiety; he felt not for himself, but for all that he loved. He saw terrible danger close at hand, and could do no more to meet it. So after he had given all orders and made all preparations he remained alone on the further shore of the stream to commune with his own heart and with God. He had conducted his caravan through

the stream, and he returned alone to the northern shore to wait a while. When I read of this strange pause and quietness before the great hour of trial began, I cannot help thinking of my Lord in the garden, praying for me and for my brethren, entering into a strange conflict of soul before His outward suffering began.

24. And Jacob was left alone ; and there wrestled a Man with him until the breaking of the day. 25. And when He saw that He prevailed not against him, He touched the hollow of his thigh ; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with Him.

In Jacob's hard struggle in the darkness with an unknown Adversary, I am reminded of my Lord struggling with the burden of our sins, with the wrath of His Father, with unknown agonies which are too deep for me to understand. I think of Him Who wrestled in 'strong crying and tears,' Who had to taste the bitter cup, to bear the hour of darkness. I recall Him Who was 'sore amazed and very heavy,' Who said, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' He did not give up His task for shame, or for pain, or for desolation of spirit. He persevered till Divine justice was appeased and our pardon assured. Yet it was by His very weakness He triumphed. All His wisdom, His holiness, His supernatural power would not have sufficed. No, it was by weakness, by shame, by tears, by parting of soul and body, by the grave. By these, O Prince of God, Thou didst win that conflict in which no mere wisdom or glory could have prevailed.

26. And He said, Let Me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.

He clung fast, though with failing strength. He knew that great issues hung on the blessing which he resolved to win. He knew that the night was ending, and, if he persevered now, he was safe. He felt close to God's deep designs, God's marvels. So did our gracious Saviour carry His work right through, seeking not His own glory, but the blessing of reconciliation for us, determined to win for humanity new life and hope. Through stages of bitter death and agony of soul and the dark realms of the grave He carried that purpose on.

27. And He said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. 28. And He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel : for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

Jacob is no more a supplanter, but a Prince ; he has power with God and with men ; his prayer is heard ; his peace is won ; his soul

has passed into victory and freedom. Now our Saviour's Name of Jesus was not indeed changed in itself by the might of His Passion, but it was changed in the opinion had of it. From an ordinary name of little meaning it is now raised above every name, is honoured in realms above and below. Jesus was 'made a little lower than the angels' for a while, but now, on account of His successful struggle, is crowned with glory and honour, is known as mighty to save.

29. *And Jacob asked Him, and said, Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name. And He said, Wherefore is it that Thou dost ask after My Name? And He blessed him there.*

What was that Name? The dread Stranger told it not, but we know it. It is 'the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Faithful souls under the old covenant strove to know it, but in vain—it was not wholly revealed to their longing gaze. Christians alone can say, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercy and the God of all comfort'; to them Christ speaks plainly and not in proverbs, shows them plainly of the Father, gives unspeakable peace, the fulness of blessing. Thus, O Lord, Thou didst win a blessing for us. Thou wast in Thyself ever blessed, but Thou didst not forget Thy brethren who lay under a curse, nay, didst obtain full blessing for them.

30. *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.*

O Face of God, revealed only in flashes under the old covenant, seen more clearly, shining with mild radiance, in the person of Christ, let me ever approach Thee in humble confidence, knowing that my sins indeed are great, but Thy grace is still the same as of old.

'Through faith I see Thee face to face,
I see Thee face to face and live.
In vain I have not wept and strove,
Thy nature and Thy Name is Love.'

And in this great conflict my Saviour has been before me. Psalm xxii. contains the record of His wrestling and His victory. There I see His Divine Soul passing through these experiences.

31. *And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.* 32. *Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because He touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.*

This feebleness was the result and memorial of that great night and its conflict. Jacob passed now from reliance on himself, on

his craft, his skill, his foresight, into a humble recognition of his own nothingness and a sense of the overpowering goodness of God. Instead of trust in his own strength, he had received a sense of God's Almightyness ; and he retained a memorial of it (and his people after him), just as Christ Himself in all His majesty bears the marks of those sacred wounds which He endured for us.

CHAPTER XXXIII

1. The kindness of Jacob and Esau at their meeting. 17. Jacob cometh to Succoth. 18. At Shalem he buyeth a field and buildeth an altar called El-elohe-Israel.

AND Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. 2. And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost.

Jacob had never thought of resisting Esau by force ; and now less than ever. He was weary with watching, and with the fears and dangers of his flight from Laban. He was lame from his strange experience of the night. He had had (to use the words of his great descendant S. Paul) 'fightings without and fears within.' Yes, but he experienced also the truth of the same Apostle's words when he says, 'When I am weak, then am I strong,' or, 'I will glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.' He took one last precaution, to arrange those whom he loved, that they might have a chance of escape if blows were exchanged ; and he put the dearest in the place of most security.

3. And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

Here we see the Good Shepherd, 'When He putteth forth His sheep, He goeth before them.' He is willing, if need be, 'to lay down His life for His sheep.' Here we see the true Jacob saying, 'If ye seek Me, let these go their way.' After all his agony of soul, now that the crisis has come, he goes forward with a cheerful and resolute mind, trusting in God's protection. He humbles himself, remembering his old transgression towards his brother.

4. *And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.*

O blessing of God, which emptied Esau's heart of all its long-nourished wrath, turned all its bitterness into love! Notice how Jacob succeeded in overcoming his brother's fury. Was it not by prayer to God, by trust in God, by free liberality, by humble duty and reverence, by readiness to put himself in the lowest place? All these were inspired by God, and used by Him to bend Esau's heart. Do Thou, Lord, teach me such ways, such a secret of peace.

5. *And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.*

Who is it Who says (taking up the prophet's language), 'Behold I, and the children which God hath given me'? Who is it Who says, 'Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me'; and 'I pray that those whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me where I am'? Is it not wonderful to see Jesus our Saviour repeating Jacob's very words? We learn thereby that what was good in Jacob was by the gift and grace of Christ, Whom he represented, and that Jacob's children figure that holy household of which we are members, wherein God has set us to journey together towards heaven.

6. *Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves.* 7. *And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves.*

The women and children, who had been in great dread, and looking out for signs of the fray commencing, were restored all at once to peace and joy. Esau received their respectful duty, and addressed them with words and gestures of kindness. How many outpourings of thanks must have gone up to God from those who were so suddenly set free from their fear! No doubt Jacob taught his children to thank God for their deliverance, taught them too to value a humble and reverent demeanour, which had on this day served him well.

8. *And he said, What meanest thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, These are to find grace in the sight of my lord.*

Jacob, who had devoted himself to the pursuit of wealth, knew how to part with it, how to procure with it what was more precious.

He felt that he had no claim of his own on his brother's goodwill, and therefore he must purchase it by open-handed liberality. 'I indeed,' he seems to say, 'may be displeasing in thy sight, but my gifts are not. Let them be accepted in my place, as the expression of that love and respect I wish to show.' Let me, when I give alms, do it with this feeling, freely giving up what I have that I may please my gracious Lord, and make up for my own lack of duty in the past.

9. *And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself.* 10. *And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.*

Jacob's liberality had healed his brother's jealousy. O blessed effect of an open hand, a generous heart! Jacob saw in his brother's kindly face a token that God's Face was shining on him in mercy. It was the unseen Friend Who had provided for him this visible brotherly affection where he had only expected enmity. He was wise in discerning behind the cloud so many tokens of Him Who is ever near to help us, wise in generously parting with his choicest flocks that Esau might always have before him a lasting proof of his brother's regard.

11. *Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.* And he urged him, and he took it.

Esau looked on property as a man's own; 'Why should not Jacob retain what he had acquired?' But Jacob looked on it as a gift of God's bounty, and so to be devoted to such purposes as God indicated. He knew that by giving up the firstfruits of his toil he would gain a greater blessing on what remained. God has blessed me, made me abound in all things; let me too bless others and share with them. I will not dry up the source of all my wealth, namely, God's bounty, by being myself churlish or niggardly.

12. *And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee.* 13. *And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die.*

Here are enemies become friends, protection offered by him who had come to despoil. So great is God's sway over reluctant

hearts. But Jacob knows that Esau's pace does not suit his; he prefers to travel separately; he accommodates himself to the capacity of the little ones, of the cattle with young; it is their condition that he provides for. O that Christian pastors had always answered thus. Often they have employed Esau's methods, outward force, outward show, a march and step wholly of this world, and thus offended, vexed, oppressed tender consciences. S. Paul's plan was like Jacob's. He 'behaved himself gently' among his converts, 'even as a nurse cherisheth her children.' He was 'willing to spend, and be spent for them.'

14. *Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir.*

So may I always act and plan. Let secular power take its own way. Let this world's learning, titles, strength, remain out of my reach. Let me rather devote myself to the necessities, the religion, the progress of humble souls. Jacob preferred looking after the weak lambs, the children, the behaviour of his herdmen, the wants and sufferings of the humblest member of his caravan; this suited him better than the flash of arms, the roll of drums, the step of chargers with which Esau's host moved. No doubt he went to stay at Seir later, though we are not told of it. Certainly he would take all pains to stablish this newly-won friendship.

15. *And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me. And he said, What needeth it? let me find grace in the sight of my lord.*

So far God's angels had protected him. He had not needed other guard. Having got his brother's love, he was well off, and required no other privilege. I think that God's Church has often been greatly harmed by retaining a guard of Esau's men—I mean, by being mixed up with this world's institutions, by being disguised as a power of this world, using the arms, the gifts, the methods of this world's soldiers. It has been impossible to recognise the household of the true Jacob while it was so confounded with Esau's people.

16. *So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir.*
 17. *And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.*

Here is a second migration into the land of promise; but it differs from the earlier one of Abraham's days. Here are houses built and

a long stay made. Jacob encamps with his family, and builds them a resting-place, where they can be at peace after their long and harassed journey. He had to tell them of Abraham's days and hopes, and of the features of the land which their line was one day to possess. If he had gone with Esau, he would have had to put aside all this, for the two brothers differed wholly in their point of view. To Esau such things would have seemed dreams and fancies.

18. *And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram; and pitched his tent before the city.*

Jacob came to Sichem with his family, as his grandfather Abraham had done years before when it was yet scarcely inhabited (xii. 6). Jacob's wives and children had all been born in Mesopotamia, and felt themselves strange in the land of promise. He wished to show them Abraham's old altar (xii. 7), and make them partakers in Abraham's hopes and prayers. He desired to profess his own adherence to Abraham's faith; even in acquiring land for himself, he remained outside the Canaanite towns, and kept himself apart from their lives and doings.

19. *And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money.*

This plot of ground stretched eastward from Sichem. It contains Jacob's well and Joseph's tomb. It is dear to us, because we have read of the Lord Jesus sitting there by the well and talking to the Samaritan woman. Jacob bought it intending to bequeath it specially to his dear son Joseph as a pledge of his share in the hopes of the nation. It was regard for Jacob's memory and Jacob's faith which led the people of Sichem to listen to Christ's own words.

20. *And he erected there an altar, and called it El-Elohe-Israel.*

Was not this Abraham's old altar which time had perhaps injured? Jacob worshipped God there as 'Israel's mighty One,' remembering that awful occasion on which the name of Israel had been given to him and Who gave it. It was Jacob's wrestling, his infirmity, his pain, that gave him the right to call on God by this special Name. He won God's ear by the virtue of his conflict. So did Christ Jesus win a victory by His humiliation, by His struggles with our mortal woes and tears.

CHAPTER XXXIV

1. Dinah is ravished by Shechem. 4. He sueth to marry her. 13. The sons of Jacob offer the condition of circumcision to the Shechemites. 20. Hamor and Shechem persuade them to accept it. 25. The sons of Jacob upon that advantage slay them, 27 and spoil their city. 30. Jacob reproveth Simeon and Levi.

AND *Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.*

Guard, O Lord, the dear children, when they are entering on life; preserve them from all that may beguile their hearts, or lead them into sin. Let them prize the memory of their home, cherish a modest, humble, patient character; thus they will begin life's dangerous road safely. Dinah thought only of finding pleasure and making new experiences; but she fell into great trouble through this curiosity.

2. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her. 3. And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel. 4. And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife.

I have learnt this, that the best way of keeping from sin is to keep out of the way of temptation. If any person or occasion is dangerous to me, I had best avoid them. My virtue is not strong enough to bear the strain of frequent opportunity. Let purity be my treasure; let me rejoice to guard it; let me ever by prayer and watchfulness abide faithful to my duty; be the same in the dark as in the light; be ever mindful of God's Presence. So shall I avoid the bitterness of hateful memories later on.

5. And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter: now his sons were with his cattle in the field: and Jacob held his peace until they were come. 6. And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him. 7. And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard it: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done.

The anger of the brothers at their sister's dishonour has an honourable aspect. They will not compound the stain upon her name

for any caresses or presents ; and yet their severity strangely reminds me of Rom. ii. 21, 'Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? . . . Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?' I do not find that the transgressions of Reuben, or of Judah, or the murder contemplated against Joseph, were so bad in their brethren's eyes. How easy is this virtue of ours which condemns so severely in strangers what we allow so readily in ourselves and our friends !

8. *And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter : I pray you give her him to wife.* 9. *And make ye marriages with us, and give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you.* 10. *And ye shall dwell with us : and the land shall be before you ; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein.*

This is a proposal to relinquish God's calling, to forfeit the promises He had made, to abandon the special sanctity of the chosen family, and become as one with the heathen round about. Here is a grave temptation. They are invited by the prospect of ease, profit, and power to lay aside their life of strangers and pilgrims, and become as those 'who have no hope and are without God in the world.' If Jacob and his sons had listened to this smooth persuasion, God's plan for planting true religion amongst men, and preparing a nation and Church for His Son's Advent, would all have come to nought. Let me remain steadfast to my God, Who has called me out of the world and made me an heir of His Kingdom. I will not part with that glorious hope for the false jewels of earth.

11. *And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give.* 12. *Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me : but give me the damsel to wife.*

Shechem found no price too great to pay, if only he might enjoy Dinah for his wife. Yet, if he had obtained her, most likely his fancy would soon have been smitten by some new object. O God, do Thou direct and guide the hearts of the young, fix them early on Thee, that they may love, with Thee and in Thee, those whom Thou hast appointed for their love ! Are wayward fancy and momentary passion good guides into a harmony that is to last for life ?

13. *And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, because he had defiled Dinah*

their sister : 14. And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised ; for that were a reproach unto us : 15. But in this will we consent unto you : If ye will be as we be, that every male of you be circumcised ; 16. Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. 17. But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised ; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone.

This false overture, only designed to snare the Gentiles to their ruin, proposes a semblance of unity, but is not concerned with the reality. The sons of Jacob did not propose to the inhabitants of the land that they should worship the True God or reform their lives according to His Law. No ; all they proposed was to imprint a sign of subjection upon their bodies, and, unless they had this, they were to be held as unclean and unfit for intercourse. I am somewhat reminded, in reading this, of those Jewish Christians in S. Paul's time, against whom he fought so strenuously, who laboured to oblige Gentile Christians to accept circumcision as a mere outward rite, and would have no communion with them otherwise.

18. And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor's son. 19. And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter : and he was more honourable than all the house of his father.

They were deceived by the false condition : they threw away, for the time, their strength and power of resistance, so that they were helpless in the hour of danger. So S. Paul says to wavering, doubtful hearts who are perplexed between Christ and the Jewish Law : 'I, Paul, say unto you, if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. Ye that will be justified by the Law, ye are separated from Christ, ye are fallen from grace.' He points out to them that this method of seeking peace is false and ruinous.

20. And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men of their city, saying, 21. These men are peaceable with us ; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein ; for the land, behold, it is large enough for them ; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters. 22. Only herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if

every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. 23. *Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us.* 24. *And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city.*

O what false confidence! Destruction was preparing for them, and they, all the while, were full of hopes of growing rich by intercourse with Jacob's family. They already looked on his wealth as their own. One might say to them with S. Paul, 'Who hath bewitched you?' or, 'They zealously seek you in no good way' (Gal. v. 17). It was not any improvement in faith or manners that the Canaanites sought by outward conformity with the heirs of promise, nothing but mere wealth, and the bait drew them to destruction.

25. *And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.* 26. *And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of their sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.*

Of this action Jacob himself says (xlix. 7): 'Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel.' It was quite contrary to the statutes of that God Whom they professed to serve; nor could their outraged honour justify it. But I see a figure here of mysteries that the Gospel was to reveal: how that the severity of the Law knew of no pardon, that circumcision and the other prescribed rites brought no real forgiveness—nought was there but precept and recompense; for grace and pardoning mercy souls had to look elsewhere.

27. *The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister.* 28. *They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field,* 29. *And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house.*

Thus wrong was punished by wrong, outrage by worse outrage.

Our Lord checks such hasty vengeance by reminding us, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.'

But were not all the inhabitants of Canaan to be destroyed and

their possessions seized by the descendants of Jacob under Joshua's leadership? Yes; but that decree was not yet made known. God in His wisdom and for grave reasons (some of which I can discern) ordained through Moses that those nations should be exterminated from before the face of His people, and the land wholly cleared for their settlement therein. Such was the warfare of early times; nor did God act otherwise than through the customs and feelings that were then prevalent. But no such order had been given here. On this occasion the chosen family appears as if sinking to the level of a tribe of robbers.

30. *And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.* 31. *And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?*

Jacob's proper weapons were peace and patience. He had the example of Abraham and Isaac before him. He went as a sojourner and pilgrim through the world. This violent outrage, this unsparing plunder, were alien to his character. He says to his sons, like Christ to His disciples, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.' The God of Abraham did not bid His servants seek His protection and win His favour by these means. 'We shall thus,' Jacob felt, 'be abandoned by God, as well as overwhelmed by enemies.' Cruelty and dissimulation such as these brethren had used were an abiding grief to their father, though he kept his judgment secret as yet.

CHAPTER XXXV

1. God sendeth Jacob to Beth-el. 2. He purgeth his house of idols. 6. He buildeth an altar at Beth-el. 8. Deborah dieth at Allonbachuth. 9. God blesseth Jacob at Beth-el. 16. Rachel travaileth of Benjamin, and dieth in the way to Edar. 22. Reuben lieth with Bilhah. 23. The sons of Jacob. 27. Jacob cometh to Isaac at Hebron. 28. The age, death, and burial of Isaac.

AND God said unto Jacob, *Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.*

This is a word of comfort, and also of reproach. Amidst gathering dangers and fears Jacob is reminded of Him Who had been his

support and succour in previous trials. Could not He Who protected Jacob before protect him now? And yet the Heavenly Voice has something of reproach in it; it seems to remind Jacob of a too-long-neglected duty. Why had he not sooner paid his vows and made his prayer at the holy place, as he had promised? Trouble and fear came on him, and then he listened to the voice of God, reminding him of a forgotten duty.

2. *Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:* 3. *And let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, Who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.*

Jacob's household had now grown large; it was augmented too by the captives from Shechem. Rachel had brought sacred images with her from Mesopotamia, and no doubt there were some persons in so large a company who worshipped idols secretly or publicly. Here is an invitation to put away all these and to begin afresh with the love and service of the True God. The changing their garments, polluted by blood, was but a figure of the inward change which God requires of His worshippers. Jacob bade his household consider the Truth, the Mercy, the Omnipresence of that God Whom he worshipped. How much more worthy an object of worship He is than mere dumb idols!

4. *And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.*

These idols and these charms were put right out of sight and hidden for ever. Was it the same great oak which overshadowed the place of their burial and which had stood when Abraham entered the land (xii. 6), that was still fresh and living when Joshua (Josh. xxiv. 26) set up the memorial stone under it? If it was the same tree, what a tale it might have told of the great men and great events it had seen, itself unchanged. To it, as to the churchyard yew, might be said,

'In thy continuance thou mayest see in scorn
Men's feeble generations, that are born
And die, and then unto thy feet are brought';

but yet in a simple heart that loves God there is an enduring force and immortality of a far higher order.

5. *And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.*

Jacob left the world's idols buried under the oak, which rose over them like the Cross over vanquished heathenism: and his enemies forthwith despaired of injuring him or repaying the cruel violence of his sons. God had, as before-time, turned away wrath, over-ruled hearts, shown Himself as the powerful Protector of those to whom His promises were committed.

6. *So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Beth-el, he and all the people that were with him.*

7. *And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-El: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.*

He came back to the sacred place, not now alone, but increased in numbers and in goods. He brought back many memories from his twenty years' absence. He and his household joined in solemn worship to that God Who had proved Himself true. Now that God is my God. I praise and serve the God of Jacob. He can be to me as faithful and merciful as Jacob found Him. I will offer to Him my best duty and service, knowing He is worthy of more than I can give.

8. *But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Beth-el under an oak: and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth.*

Here is indeed (as Archbishop Laud says of his steward) an 'ancient, loving, and faithful servant' who died 'to the great both loss and grief' of her masters. She had accompanied Jacob's mother from the far East, and had been ever since a centre of good, a teacher of love and duty to several generations. Jacob's family showed solemn grief at her burial, as a testimony to her great worth; she had left her home to share the wanderings and dangers of the holy household, and to receive and pass on their hopes of salvation to come.

9. *And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him.* 10. *And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and He called his name Israel.*

He had rightly called this place the gate of Heaven, for he still finds it open for blessings and promises to come down thence to him.

He comes there after more than twenty years and revives the old impression which he had gained there at first. Again he hears the promises, is encouraged and cheered by Divine mercy. So, O God, when our dear young people come back to visit their old home, the church where their childhood worshipped, do Thou awaken and stablish in them resolutions and impressions of good.

11. *And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins;*
12. *And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.*
13. *And God went up from him in the place where He talked with him.*

How was all this to come true? It reads like the promises in Psalm ii. : 'Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession.' No mere multiplication of the Jewish nation, nor the crown of a sin-stained and divided royalty on their brows, could fulfil what is here set forth so gloriously. 'I gave the land to Abraham and Isaac,' says the Voice. Yet, Lord, Abraham had nothing of it but a grave, and Isaac was lingering on in obscurity, blind, and almost forgotten. Ah, the words refer to a spiritual posterity whom God should make 'kings and priests' through His dear Son's consecrated royalty; they tell of 'an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled' on which believers enter.

14. *And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon.* 15. *And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Beth-el.*

Was not this the same stone, now re-edified, which he had erected long ago? He did not offer sacrifice upon it, but retained it as a twice-holy memorial. It is like our Christian altar, not a place for bleeding victims, but for a spiritual offering of praise in which God's grace descends invisibly, and where wine represents the precious Blood shed once for all. Yet in His law God warned the Israelites (Lev. xxvi. 1) against setting up or honouring such sacred stones, showing us how soon due reverence might pass into superstition. Remember, this twice-consecrated Bethel, so dear to faith, became the shrine of the golden calf, the place accursed and denounced by God's prophets. O God of Bethel, Who hast been faithful to me all my days, let me not become unbelieving and reprobate, and so provoke Thee, Who art my best and truest Friend!

16. *And they journeyed from Beth-el ; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath : and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. 17. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not ; thou shalt have this son also.*

Rachel said of old to her husband, 'Give me children, or else I die,' and behold the very fulfilment of her desire brought death to her. Why has God so ordered it that we cannot begin life without agony and danger to her who has conceived us in her womb? I know not, but it may be that His design was to plant maternal love thus, to make thus a mysterious and intimate link between the mother and her offspring, whom she has borne at the risk of her life. Christ Himself on the Cross gave birth to our salvation with long travail and anguish.

18. *And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing (for she died) that she called his name Ben-oni : but his father called him Benjamin.*

'Son of sorrow,' his mother said ; 'son of strength, son of prosperity,' said his father. This was his father's darling, the youngest by far of all his children, and in whom his old age was wrapt up. All Christians may in a figurative sense be called 'sons of sorrow,' and yet 'sons of strength,' for Christ's Cross and Resurrection are the double source of their life—they look to One Who went through agony and the grave, and yet One Whose power brought life out of death. These are one, not two, one and the selfsame Saviour.

19. *And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Beth-lehem. 20. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave : that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.*

Jacob had said, like the shepherds in the Gospel, 'Let us now go even unto Bethlehem,' when this disaster overtook him. His dear Rachel, who had shared his toils and journeys for so many years, must leave him now. Once her love had made the long years pass like a few days, but in his old age he was deprived of her. She could comfort him no longer. She had now to go another road while he pursued his homeward journey. He did not carry her onward to the cave of Machpelah and lay her in Abraham's grave, but built her a monument which should witness to the land being her children's heritage. She lay so near to Bethlehem that the prophet, when he spoke of the tears of sufferers there, called it 'Rachel weeping for her children.'

21. *And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.*

This tower marked some pasture-fields; it was used to watch and protect the flocks. Perhaps this was the very spot where the shepherds were to keep their flocks on Christmas night, and Jacob with his flocks was occupying the same place eighteen hundred years before. What knowledge had he of the promised Saviour? We know not what glimpses God may have given him, what thoughts were in his mind as he walked through those blessed fields.

22. *And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:*

Now that Rachel was dead, her maid, Bilhah, was without a guide and protector. Reuben's great crime was known to and remembered by his father, who denounced it in his last words (xlix. 4); it brought on him a curse instead of a blessing; it caused his privilege as the first-born to pass to Joseph, who loved and cherished purity. The history of Jacob's family is plain spoken, telling us of the evil as well as the good, telling us where the children fell away from their parents' teaching and God's law.

23. *The sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun:*
 24. *The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin:* 25. *And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali:*
 26. *And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid; Gad, and Asher: these are the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padan-aram.*

These twelve, with all their individual sins and failures, are yet the company of patriarchs who founded the twelve tribes of Israel. To them answer under the Gospel 'the glorious company of the Apostles' who founded the spiritual Israel to which we belong. 'The Israel of God' is, in S. Paul's judgment, a spiritual, not an earthly kinship; it is made up of Jews or Gentiles, of bond or free, —in short, of all those who worship the God of Israel as revealed to us in His only Son, Christ Jesus. Israel's psalms, Israel's prophets, Israel's prayers are ours, only we see more meaning in them than the Jews could discern.

27. *And Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned.*

Isaac had long lived at Gerar or at Beersheba, but in his latter days he came to sojourn near his father Abraham's grave. He desired to quit this life with the same dispositions as Abraham had had. He knew that the promises could not come true on earth for him any more than for Abraham. No, he looked for eternal peace, for 'an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away'—these earth could not give.

28. *And the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years.*

He had been blind many years when he died. His death did not come till some time after the events recorded in this chapter, not till after Joseph had been lost, not till a few years before the migration into Egypt. So his last days were saddened by Jacob's grief for Joseph, and by the approaching famine. Isaac had lived a life hidden with God. His life recalls our Saviour's thirty years of silence and seclusion. Isaac's birth, his willingness to be sacrificed on Mount Moriah, the birth of his sons, the infirmities and patience of his long decay, these are all that we know of him, but the rest is known to God.

29. *And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.*

A long life; but, when it is over, a long life and a short life are the same—only faith and love never die. If we by faith unite our hearts to God's eternity, something remains though our body has turned to dust and our name is forgotten. Esau and Jacob met again at Isaac's funeral; they too were grown old, and their enmity had completely passed away. God had mercifully blotted out the jealousies of bygone years. How gracious is He in not suffering us to follow out our hasty anger!

CHAPTER XXXVI

1. Esau's three wives. 6. His removal to mount Seir. 9. His sons. 15. The dukes which descended of his sons. 20. The sons and dukes of Seir. 24. Anah findeth mules. 31. The kings of Edom. 40. The dukes that descended of Esau.

NOW *these are the generations of Esau, who is Edom.* 2. *Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan; Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite; 3. And Bashemath Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebajoth. 4. And Adah bare to Esau Eliphaz; and Bashemath bare Reuel; 5. And Aholibamah bare Jeush, and Jaalam, and Korah: these are the sons of Esau, which were born unto him in the land of Canaan.*

The names of Esau's wives have been given already (xxvi. 34, and xxviii. 9), but differently from this passage, nor is it easy to explain how the difference arose. It is, however, clear that two of his wives were of the nations of Canaan, strangers to the hopes of Abraham's house, and that the daughter of Ishmael, whom he married afterwards, did nothing to remedy this alienation of heart, which ended in a lasting enmity between the descendants of Esau and those of Jacob. Esau's family are recounted in this chapter for his father Isaac's sake, not as if they had any place in the line of promise; they were broken off from the good olive-tree, and planted outside the Lord's chosen garden. Yet they attained worldly power long before the family of Jacob.

6. *And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the persons of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his substance, which he had got in the land of Canaan; and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob. 7. For their riches were more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle. 8. Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau is Edom.*

Esau and Jacob were both wealthy, the former much more powerful and more feared. They shared Isaac's riches between them after his death, nor did any return of the old jealousy trouble their peace while they lived; but Esau left Canaan and established himself in Mount Seir. He had no faith in and consequently no

share in the great things which God had promised to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob, when he slept alone at Bethel with the stone for his pillow, was in reality far richer than Esau at the head of his warriors, for he had a secret treasure of faith and grace which he never lost. Outwardly the life and property and occupation of the two brothers resembled each other, but Esau's thoughts never went heavenwards, angels never met him, nor did any Divine Voice cheer or restrain him. In Mount Seir no altars arose to the true God.

9. *And these are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in mount Seir:* 10. *These are the names of Esau's sons; Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Bashemath the wife of Esau.* 11. *And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz.* 12. *And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek: these were the sons of Adah Esau's wife.* 13. *And these are the sons of Reuel; Nahath, and Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah: these were the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife.* 14. *And these were the sons of Aholibamah, the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon, Esau's wife: and she bare to Esau Jeush, and Jaalam, and Korah.* 15. *These were dukes of the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz the firstborn son of Esau; duke Teman, duke Omar, duke Zepho, duke Kenaz,* 16. *Duke Korah, duke Getam, and duke Amalek: these are the dukes that came of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these were the sons of Adah.* 17. *And these are the sons of Reuel Esau's son; duke Nahath, duke Zerah, duke Shammah, duke Mizzah: these are the dukes that came of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife.* 18. *And these are the sons of Aholibamah Esau's wife; duke Jeush, duke Jaalam, duke Korah: these were the dukes that came of Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau's wife.* 19. *These are the sons of Esau, who is Edom, and these are their dukes.*

These fourteen dukes or sheikhs descended from Esau, were the heads of powerful tribes; their names were feared in war, honoured in peace; their dwelling was the great mountain range which runs from the eastern side of the Dead Sea to the eastern arm of the Red Sea. The inaccessible rocks, deep winding valleys, caves and mountain sanctuaries of that land were the secure portion of Esau's children; meanwhile the house of Jacob learned 'to labour and wait.' They had to pass through years of bondage, years of wandering, before they found a home.

20. *These are the sons of Seir the Horite, who inhabited the land; Lotan, and Shobal, and Zibeon, and Anah, 21. And Dishon, and Ezer, and Dishan: these are the dukes of the Horites, the children of Seir in the land of Edom. 22. And the children of Lotan were Hori and Heman; and Lotan's sister was Timna. 23. And the children of Shobal were these; Alvan, and Manahath, and Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. 24. And these are the children of Zibeon; both Ajah, and Anah: this was that Anah that found the mules in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon his father. 25. And the children of Anah were these; Dishon, and Aholibamah, the daughter of Anah. 26. And these are the children of Dishon; Hemdam, and Eshban, and Ithran, and Cheran. 27. The children of Ezer are these; Bilhan, and Zaavan, and Akan. 28. The children of Dishan are these; Uz, and Aran. 29. These are the dukes that came of the Horites; duke Lotan, duke Shobal, duke Zibeon, duke Anah, 30. Duke Dishon, duke Ezer, duke Dishan; these are the dukes that came of Hori, among their dukes in the land of Seir.*

In these verses are mentioned the chiefs of the Horite tribes, who preceded Esau's family on Mount Seir. They already possessed it in Abraham's time (xiv. 6); afterwards they were allied to and then overthrown by the house of Esau (Deut. ii. 12). We know little more of them than their names and the country that they lived in. One of them found the hot springs (so the word used in verse 24 seems to mean) in the wilderness when he was keeping his father's asses. Perhaps this was the same sulphur spring which still flows about two leagues from the eastern side of the Dead Sea. How hard it is to believe that all these long since forgotten warriors of old time, each with their separate weight of responsibilities, each with their own opportunities and trials, live to God and will appear in the Judgment Day!—yet so faith teaches.

31. *And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel. 32. And Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom: and the name of his city was Dinhabah. 33. And Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead. 34. And Jobab died, and Husham of the land of Temani reigned in his stead. 35. And Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who smote Midian in the field of Moab, reigned*

in his stead: and the name of his city was Avith. 36. And Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his stead. 37. And Samlah died, and Saul of Rehoboth by the river reigned in his stead. 38. And Saul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his stead. 39. And Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Pau; and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab.

These kings of old time were, it would seem, elective—we never read of son succeeding father. They came from different places; some were foreigners, not Edomites. Their reigns were, it would seem, short and troubled. They pass over the stage of history like Banquo's descendants in the magic glass, carrying indeed crowns and sceptres, yet but of a shadowy royalty. God's will for Israel (1 Sam. viii. 7) was that His chosen people should do without kings. He would provide for them better otherwise. It was a downward step, though foretold, when they insisted on having a king like other nations.

40. And these are the names of the dukes that came of Esau, according to their families, after their places, by their names; duke Timnah, duke Alvah, duke Jetheth, 41. Duke Aholibamah, duke Elah, duke Pinon, 42. Duke Kenaz, duke Teman, duke Mibzar, 43. Duke Magdiel, duke Iram: these be the dukes of Edom, according to their habitations in the land of their possession: he is Esau the father of the Edomites.

These were 'the dukes of Edom,' who 'were amazed' at the victories of triumphant Israel (Exod. xv. 5). Yet it was not with brotherly feeling or sympathy. When Israel, after their long wanderings, came near the territory of Edom in their march toward the promised land, and humbly petitioned for a passage through it, they were harshly refused, and had to take a long circuitous route 'to compass the land of Edom.' During the period of the kings of Israel, mutual hostilities, wars, massacres, marked the relations of the two peoples. At the downfall of Jerusalem the Edomites were the bitterest enemies the Jews had (Psalm cxxxvii. 7). Thus the reconciliation of Esau and Jacob bore no fruit for their descendants, whereas their enmity and distrust revived again and were perpetuated.

CHAPTER XXXVII

2. Joseph is hated of his brethren. 5. His two dreams. 13. Jacob sendeth him to visit his brethren, 18. His brethren conspire his death. 21. Reuben saveth him. 26. They sell him to the Ishmaelites. 31. His father, deceived by the bloody coat, mourneth for him. 36. He is sold to Potiphar in Egypt.

AND *Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.*

Esau was gone, but Jacob remained. Esau had renounced the dim future hopes of his kindred and grasped instead the more visible and tangible chieftainship of Mount Seir; but Jacob remained behind in Canaan, confident that what God had promised He would perform, even though no outward signs of it appeared. His conduct is what the Apostle recommends to us where he says, 'Cast not away then your confidence which hath great recompense of reward; for ye have need of patient endurance, that having done the will of God, ye may inherit the promise; for yet a very little while and He that cometh will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith, but if he draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.'

2. *These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.*

Joseph was trained for his great destiny by a shepherd's duties, like David in after time. He had to bear heat and cold and share in all the herdsmen's labours. When he came to high place he had learnt humility and consideration for the weak by the experience of his own youth. When his brethren spoke or acted wrongly, he, though the younger, protested. His rule was the Apostle's, 'Have no fellowship with the works of darkness, but rather reprove them.'

3. *Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.*

Who is this beloved son, born late, and yet preferred before his brethren? He is one of them, yet stands apart from them in

purity and grace. The robe his father made him was but a sign of inward superiority. May we not exclaim when we read—

‘O purest semblance of the Eternal Son,
Who dwelt in thee, as in some blessed shrine,
To draw hearts after thee and make them thine!’

4. *And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.*

Of whom is it said that His enemies ‘began to press upon Him vehemently and question Him about many things, laying wait for something to come out of His mouth, that they might accuse Him’ (S. Luke xi. 53, 54)? Who is it who says, ‘Now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father?’ I observe in Joseph a figure of that Divine Person Who showed forth all perfection in human nature, and Whose spotless purity, intimate union with His heavenly Father, deep heart-searching wisdom, made those envy who did not love.

5. *And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more.* 6. *And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed:*

They hated him before because he blamed their faults, and because he was so dear to their father, and now yet more because of the presages he had of his future greatness. In this too he resembled Christ Jesus, Who drove His enemies to fury by saying, ‘Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.’ The Lord’s greatness and majesty was concealed for a while, kept dark until the moment for His exaltation arrived, as it had been with Joseph in the days of his humility.

7. *For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.*

Jacob, then, like his father Isaac (xxvi. 12), sometimes joined agriculture with the care of flocks. He did not lead, like Abraham, a wholly pastoral life. This harvest dream Joseph had takes our thoughts to Christ’s word about the corn of wheat that dies and yet brings forth much fruit (S. John xii. 24). Christ is the firstfruits of the harvest, raised up and presented before God, to bring a blessing on all the other sheaves. Rightly we bow down before Him, we adore Him from Whom all good and blessing come.

8. *And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.*

It happened so, in time to come. Joseph's brethren indeed bowed before him and felt that their whole dependence was in his mercy. So it is with Christ the Lord. He is a man like us, born of a human Mother, nourished as other children are, subject to the cares and sorrows of mortals, yet we say, 'Thou art the King of glory, O Christ.' We acknowledge readily that He is our true Lord: there is no disgrace in giving all honour, all glory to Him. He reigns to bless, not oppress us.

9. *And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.*

All this is too great for Joseph, but suits perfectly with Christ. Our Saviour is worshipped by saints of the old covenant and the new. He is the centre to which all true hearts turn; they ascribe to Him whatever goodness they have, whatever light they shine with. Twice over came this dream-warning, signifying Joseph's future distinction, and verified by the event; and yet dreams are mostly mere idle fancy. Do Thou, Lord, if Thou hast a message for me by day or night, in sleep or waking, make me discern Thy word clearly and understand its meaning. Thou hast ways of distinguishing what is false from what is true. Thou canst keep me from putting my trust in folly.

10. *And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? 11. And his brethren envied him: but his father observed the saying.*

Jacob watched over his son's character, and checked in him any rudiments of conceit. He bade him recollect his place and duty; and yet he pondered over the tokens of his future greatness. He, in his fatherly care, resembles Mary, who reproved her Divine Son for remaining behind in the Temple (S. Luke ii. 48), and yet 'kept in her heart' all the sayings and incidents that pointed towards His true nature and Divine glory. Joseph grew up thus, like Christ Jesus after him, in wisdom and grace, as in years.

12. *And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.* 13. *And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I.* 14. *And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.*

This errand is like that of David in 1 Samuel xvii., when Jesse sent him down to the camp to see after his brethren's welfare; and the elder brothers there received the younger somewhat in the same manner as these did, though they did not proceed to violence. These two, Joseph and David, sent by their father to visit their brethren, full of kindness for them, willingly obeying, cheerfully venturing, yet misunderstood and reviled, are figures of a more important visit, a holier Brother, an errand of greater love, more cruelly misunderstood. Joseph went to Shechem. Strange that Jacob's sons should go back to the neighbourhood of that city which they had used so ill (ch. xxxiv.); but it would seem that Jacob valued much the piece of land which he had bought there, and that he had had at one period to reclaim his right to it by force (xlviii. 22). We know how the true Joseph went there long afterwards and sat down wearied by the well.

15. *And a certain man found him, and behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou?* 16. *And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks.* 17. *And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan.*

So Christ Jesus 'came down to earth from heaven,' came seeking us, pursued our redemption with labour and pain. 'What seekest thou?' is a question which may be profitably addressed to the young, it bids us reflect on the object of our life. Mostly we shall find whatever we seek with energy; but let it be a good aim, a true and satisfying reward. Joseph came to Dothan, where the prophet Elisha lived long afterwards. It was there that the young man who waited on Elisha sought and found the assurance that God protects His servants (2 Kings vi. 17).

18. *And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.*

Envy and hatred only wait for a chance. If you nourish those vipers in your bosom you may expect some day they will bite you.

Lord, let me in quiet hours regulate my heart and thoughts, so that I may not fall under the opportunity when some deadly temptation to vice or violence comes upon me. If there is any one I much dislike, let me pray for him and cultivate thoughts of peace towards him; so shall I not be overcome by resentment at some bitter word or shifty dealing of his. Far better for me to overcome evil with good; that is true victory.

19. *And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.* 20. *Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.*

Here we seem to be listening to Christ's enemies seeking how they may destroy Him, jealous because of His growing influence, determined to end it. What, nothing but dreams to make brothers so bitter! Yes; most of the things men contend so violently about are mere dreams, no substance in them. It is some trifle, some flattering honour, some imperceptible advantage which has brought about war and desolation, has destroyed thousands of lives and homes. The brothers when they said exultingly, 'What will become of his dream-honours then, when he is safely killed and put away?' are like those Jews who spoke of the Lord as 'that deceiver,' and said, 'He saved others, Himself He cannot save.' They laughed to think of all His glorious words and lofty claims being confounded by failure; but truth was otherwise.

21. *And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.* 22. *And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him, that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.*

Reuben's ineffectual kindness holds the same place as St. Peter's attempted defence of Christ Jesus when He was being apprehended. 'Non tali auxilio.' God's plans were different; man's violence is after all but an instrument in His Hand, it but works out the Divine plan. Still, it is good to notice in Reuben, as against his vicious and unstable character, this bright instance of kindness; perhaps he feared lest Joseph's death might be reckoned to himself, put down to his envy of that brother who had succeeded to the place and esteem which he had himself lost.

23. *And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; 24. And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.*

Yet God said, 'I am with him in trouble. I will deliver him and bring him to honour.' Was Joseph able, in this moment of danger, and in the darkness of the pit, to recall God's Presence, to lay hold on the Divine Hand? We know not, but there have been holy souls who have been upheld when all seemed darkest. God has been with them in their worst moments of pain or insult. Joseph laid in the pit, out of sight and hope, reminds us of Christ Jesus descending into the under-world; but it was that He might carry there a message of comfort.

25. *And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.*

The Ishmaelites had already become used to commerce, and supplied luxurious Egypt with precious gums and spices. They had caravans well organised and guarded. How different is this from the wandering pastoral life of Jacob's family! But yet the latter had one treasure, knowledge of the true God, which the others had almost entirely lost. This was worth more to the world's future than all other riches.

26. *And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? 27. Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hands be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content.*

Joseph's life trembled in the balance; finally, it was settled that he should be got rid of by being sold as a slave. Yet in God's Book his safety and honour were all guaranteed. He 'went through fire and water,' but it was that God might 'bring him out into a wealthy place.' He seemed to his brothers a worthless object, to be got rid of one way or another; they mocked his entreaties (xl. 21). How bitterly in time to come they recollected this scene! Did they not, all unknowingly, represent that great occasion when Christ's own nation rejected Him and gave Him away to the Gentiles?

28. *Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen ; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver : and they brought Joseph into Egypt.*

All the various families that traced their line to Abraham are here represented as combining together against Joseph. The Ishmaelites were children of Hagar, the Midianites of Keturah, and Jacob's sons of Sarah ; these last were the worst. Joseph was alone, amongst so many cruel or indifferent spectators. He was rejected by his father's house and handed over to strangers ; thus figuring Christ, Whose message was rejected by His own people and then transferred to the Gentile world. The former, says the Apostle (Acts xiii. 46), 'counted themselves unworthy of everlasting life,' so its heralds 'turned to the Gentiles.'

29. *And Reuben returned unto the pit ; and behold, Joseph was not in the pit ; and he rent his clothes.* 30. *And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not ; and I, whither shall I go ?*

Why was Reuben out of sight just when he was most wanted ? He was genuinely sorry for his brother, and had tried in vain (xlii. 22) to turn the others from their purpose ; and yet when Joseph was to be sold Reuben happened to be out of the way. This belongs to his character, and explains his not excelling in anything. Let me ask of God a steadfast heart ; let me put Christ's business first, and never attend to my own convenience before the welfare of my brethren and the glory of God.

31. *And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood ;* 32. *And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father ; and said, This have we found : know now whether it be thy son's coat or no.* 33. *And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat ; an evil beast hath devoured him ; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.*

Who is it who comes forward in vision clothed in a garment dipped in blood (Rev. xix. 13) ? Yet it is not for vengeance only that that Blood calls ; it 'speaks better things' than the blood of Old Testament saints ; nay, by it other robes are made white (Rev. vii. 14). We who present before our heavenly Father the tokens of Christ's Death, the Wounds which His Sacred Humanity endured, do so with humble confidence, acknowledging our guilt but relying on Divine Mercy.

34. *And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.*

Jacob thought it no shame to give way to his grief for this dear and honoured son. He was not one of those who profess a philosophic indifference to tears and pain. Oh no; it is well for us to 'humble ourselves under the mighty Hand of God.' It is well for us, like the Divine Exemplar, to weep when affliction touches us, to grieve for our brethren's grief; such tears God will in due time wipe away; they do not express discontent with God's will, nor a merely selfish sorrow.

35. *And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.*

Jacob's thoughts went onward to the other world, where he thought his dear Joseph was gone. He looked forward to the world of shadows as reuniting him to his darling again. Now that Jesus has in reality gone that road, has lain in the pit, has lightened the darkness of the grave, we can look forward with some fear and yet more hope to the swiftly coming end of our earthly life.

'As in the pit his father's darling lay
Beside the desert way,
And knew not how, but knew his God could save
Even from that living grave,'

so we contemplate approaching death, and know that it cannot extinguish love.

36. *And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.*

He was sold as a beast might have been. Far away were all the hopes and plans of his youth, far away his father's love, far away the worship of the God of Abraham. Yet Joseph stored in his heart these dear memories. He had hope and a good conscience. He was a man though a slave. He disposed himself not to fruitless regrets, but to do well all that he was ordered to do; he determined to deserve and win trust.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

1. Judah begetteth Er, Onan, and Shelah. 6. Er marrieth Tamar.
8. The trespass of Onan. 12. Tamar stayeth for Shelah. 13. She deceiveth Judah. 27. She beareth twins, Pharez and Zarah.

AND it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned into a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. 2. And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her.

Judah was still very young, only three years older than Joseph. He left the society of his own family and allied himself with the inhabitants of Canaan both by friendship and by marriage. His sons turned out ill as they grew up. He himself fell into grave sin, out of which were born the children who became heads of the chief families of the tribe. Why is this story related to us, except to show that Divine Grace does not take account of any preceding merit? Abraham had been an idolater. Isaac was chosen before his birth. Jacob obtained the blessing by craft in preference to his elder brother; and now Judah is Christ's ancestor rather than Joseph, and the descendants of incest rather than those of faithful marriage. All these carry on the line of promise; all these appear in the genealogy of Christ; all these hand on the deposit of faith in a Redeemer Who, when He came, brought cleansing to sinners, mercy to those most undeserving.

3. And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er. 4. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. 5. And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him. 6. And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar. 7. And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him.

Er was very young, yet his wickedness provoked his early death. Let me so clearly put God's law and its holy requirements before the eyes of the young that they may understand that they are accountable beings. They find themselves in no chance world, but under the rule of a righteous Governor; cruelty, impurity,

deceit, cannot but bring misery ; as a lad sows, so will he reap. Fix these truths, dear Lord, on the minds of the young, and those who have to teach them.

8. *And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.*
 9. *And Onan knew that the seed should not be his ; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother.* 10. *And the thing which he did displeased the Lord : wherefore he slew him also.*

Then the injunction of the Mosaic Law (Deut. xxv. 5), bidding the brother marry the widow of his childless brother, and appointing that the eldest son of such a marriage should be reckoned as the son of the dead brother and succeed to his inheritance, was but the perpetuation of an ancient custom. Its purpose was to preserve the name of the dead and to retain the division of inheritances. But Onan refused to fulfil this duty. He would not part with the inheritance that had belonged to his brother, or he would not abridge his own liberty by becoming a father. So he perpetrated wickedness instead. It is true that perverted reason sets itself to justify such excesses, but I appeal to the natural instinct of man and to God's holy law as saying plainly what is right and what is wrong in this matter. On these I take my stand, and refuse to alter.

11. *Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter-in-law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown : for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.*

Judah was horrified at his sons' deaths, but we do not read that he himself learnt from God's awful judgments to live a pure and godly life. He promised Shelah to his daughter-in-law, but insincerely, not meaning to give him to her. He bade her return to her father's house and set there a good example of chaste widowhood, but he never intended that his own life as a widower should be chaste. S. Paul's advice to widows (1 Cor. vii. 39, 40, and 1 Tim. v. 3-15) has a true ring about it, a sober practicalness.

12. *And in process of time the daughter of Shuah Judah's wife died ; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his*

sheepshearers to Timnath, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.

Judah had lost his wife and finished his mourning for her. He was about to take part in the shearing festival, and share the mirth of his companions. His friend the Adullamite was apparently a person of easy virtue and worldly maxims, whose presence would not put him to shame in anything. Judah had not, like his brother Joseph, the practice of remembering God's Presence as a safeguard in hours of temptation.

13. *And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father-in-law goeth up to Timnath to shear his sheep.* 14. *And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a vail, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife.*

Tamar is not so much to be blamed for her wickedness as excused for her ignorance. She knew little of the spirit of true religion, but was in despair at her marriage treaty being laid aside and forgotten, and she thought that only by such a means as this could she obtain the offspring that she desired. Thus she laid aside her widow's habits, and appeared as a woman of evil life, such as were in old times excluded from cities and forced to haunt the roads. Thus she laid a snare into which Judah fell because he had put aside self-restraint, and the fear of God Who is ever nigh.

15. *When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot; because she had covered her face.* 16. *And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she was his daughter-in-law). And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me?* 17. *And he said, I will send thee a kid from the flock.* *And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it?* 18. *And he said, What pledge shall I give thee?* *And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that is in thine hand.* *And he gave it her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him.* 19. *And she arose, and went away, and laid by her vail from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood.*

Judah fell, just as his descendant David was overthrown in a moment, by looking when he should have turned his eyes away. To those

who regard fornication as a thing indifferent, we would say, Who is there that could bear to think of his sister or daughter being dishonoured? Who would not feel the bitterest shame and indignation at being compelled to witness such an outrage? And if we honour good women thus, and would die to preserve their honour, how can we dare to despise and degrade their sisters, who were once perhaps the treasure of some home? Indeed, poor outcasts are deserving of the greatest pity and kindness. They need a helping hand to restore them to what God meant them to be.

20. *And Judah sent the kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman's hand: but he found her not.* 21. *Then he asked the men of that place, saying, Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side? And they said, There was no harlot in this place.* 22. *And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, that there was no harlot in this place.*

The very Canaanites who inhabited the place abhorred the notion of such a person being allowed among them. They were glad to reply that they knew of no harlot haunting there. Preserve in us, O Lord, such sentiments. Let us never attain to the fancied freedom of those bold spirits who laugh at modesty. Let our courage and liberty be all for good and upright ends. Let deeds of darkness be a shame in our judgment.

23. *And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be shamed: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her.*

Judah boasted of his exactness in performing his word and redeeming his pledge. He said that the unknown woman could have no right to reproach him. He had done just as he promised her. In all this he resembles many persons who pique themselves on their character, on their exactness in performing engagements, in discharging public duties, but forget entirely how far the requirements of God's law extend. Mercy, purity, reverence, are strictly due to Him. The law of Christ claims the whole heart and life: what have we to say to such engagements, such requirements?

24. *And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter-in-law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.*

The sentence upon Tamar pronounced her guilty of death, as being the affianced wife of Shelah, and having betrayed her promised

husband. It is not in exact accordance with the law of Moses; that, however, pronounced a sentence of death upon the unfaithful wife (Deut. xxii. 22). Those who brought to our Lord the woman taken in adultery said, 'Moses in the law commanded that such should be stoned.' Moses' law also ordered the execution of a newly married wife who should prove to have been unchaste while living in her father's house (Deut. xxii. 21). In all these points Moses only took up and apparently mitigated the rigorous penalties heretofore in force. Judah, in his cold pronouncement of the death sentence, reminds us of the way in which we blame in others the very vices to which we are ourselves secretly given. True Christians will recognise themselves in the calamities and downfalls of their brethren; will say, 'There, but for the grace of God, am I'; will say 'What is that defect in my own heart which inclines me to condemn so keenly such-and-such a transgression in another?'

25. *When she was brought forth, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, By the man, whose these are, am I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff.* 26. *And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.*

In like manner both Jew and Gentile were proved guilty before God. It was to a world of sinners that Christ came. The preaching of the Gospel brought with it the recognition of man's own wretchedness. Such a stain was allowed to subsist in the line of Christ's ancestors on purpose to illustrate how Divine mercy found in us no worthiness. Mary's Son, the purest flower of human nature, sprang from this corrupt stem. Christ's victorious grace came to revive dead souls, to wash foulest stains away. Tamar and Judah now acknowledged their fault, and each lived a widowed life henceforward in uprightness.

27. *And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb.* 28. *And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first.* 29. *And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez.* 30. *And afterward came*

out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand : and his name was called Zarah.

Here is the ancestor of the chosen seed. It is from Pharez, the child of incest, that David and David's Son descended. Pharez was the first-born son against the midwife's expectation. Zarah, who had the scarlet thread upon him, was born later, though seen before. Thus our minds are led to think of Christ Jesus, Who, though He came late in time, is the first-born of God, the leader of the noble army of saints. Those who came before as well as those who came after Him, are all marked with His Blood, and depend wholly on His righteousness. He is sung by them all—they all say, 'Worthy is the Lamb.'

CHAPTER XXXIX

1. Joseph advanced in Potiphar's house. 7. He resisteth his mistress's temptation. 13. He is falsely accused. 20. He is cast in prison. 21. God is with him there.

AND *Joseph was brought down to Egypt ; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither.*

Do not think that God neglects those who love Him, when He lets them fall into misery. Do not think that true hearts will always be happy here below. Here is one on whom God's eyes are ever open, who acknowledges God in all his ways, yet he is attacked, sold, imprisoned, falsely accused. It is true, later on, he was exalted and raised to high estate ; but there are many brave and pure souls whose captivity has never been redressed, who have breathed out their last under ill-usage or in extreme abandonment. When you read of such cases, do not say like the scoffing heathen, 'Quis putet esse Deos?' but raise your eyes higher, and recall that God's ways are not yet unveiled.

2. *And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man ; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.*
3. *And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand.*

God was with him ; that was the secret of His prosperity. Joseph used to practise the thought of God's Presence. He thought, 'God

is near, God helps and sustains me'; and this recollection cheered him in hard times, restrained him under temptation, made him do all his work in the best possible manner. Of every little bit of work he said, 'Let this be done for God's sake, and done well.' His master was thus drawn by Joseph's conduct to recognise the presence and guidance of the True God. Oh that we all by our behaviour could teach such a lesson!

4. *And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.*

Joseph had evidently the grace of government; he could be trusted to order all things well. As in after days he directed the administration of a kingdom successfully, so now his master's business, his household, land, accounts. He had the gift of knowing what each of the other servants was fit for, and he made all things go smoothly by constant patience and attention. Difficulties no doubt arose, but these he took to God, and so found solution of them.

5. *And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field.* 6. *And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured.*

No doubt Potiphar raised Joseph by degrees; first kept him about his person, then gave him this or that matter to attend to, last of all, put all business in his hands. Thus he himself was able to attend entirely to his duties at the Court, confident that all things at home would go well. Besides his good sense and integrity, Joseph was also gifted with good looks and grace. Do not put blame on such gifts. Do not think that their possessor must needs use them for selfishness or vanity. Oh no, surely they are sparks from the Divine light, they remind us of the uncreated beauty; attractiveness of look and manner is a talent which God bestows in love, which He means to be used for comfort and blessing, not wasted on sin.

7. *And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.* 8. *But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold,*

my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; 9. There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

Joseph spoke to his mistress respectfully and wisely, seeking to call her back to true and upright ways. He said to her, 'I have a master to whom I belong, and whom I am bound to respect. I am grateful to him for his goodness. I desire to prove myself worthy of the absolute trust that he has shown to me. Above all, I believe in God, Who sees and knows all that I do, and Whose holy law forbids such wickedness as this. 'I cannot,' he said, 'betray at once my kind master and my merciful God.'

10. *And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.*

I have often admired the wise rules given in a good book for those who are tempted to deadly sin. 'Battle against this vice, but do not attempt to face it directly. Avoid to the utmost of thy power every occasion and every person that brings thee into danger; if compelled at times to meet such, use a grave and modest demeanour and distant words, not any excessive tenderness or affability. Fly from temptation, for thou art as stubble before the fire, and when thou least thinkest it will overtake and ruin thee. Avoid idle dreaming; be well employed and diligent always. Do not condemn or blame others who have been guilty, but confess thyself dust and ashes. This vice is almost always connected with pride; therefore humble thyself, and rejoice in all that depreciates and crosses thy pride. Above all, watch and keep guard.'

11. *And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within. 12. And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.*

Joseph fulfils the Apostle's description of a true believer, as 'made free from sin and become a servant to God.' He regarded a good conscience as the best treasure, though he might lose all else; and God as his one sole Master Whom he must please, though all others are against him. Lord, give me grace when I am tempted to fly from the danger and seek refuge before Thy Cross. Let Thy Wounds be my succour, Thy Sacred Passion my healing remedy. Let me fly to Thee at once with an earnest word or inward aspiration; thus I shall overcome.

13. *And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth,* 14. *That she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice:* 15. *And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out.*

No doubt, as his brothers were jealous of his favour with their father, so his fellow-servants were jealous of his favour with their master. Thus this shameful accusation found willing ears to receive it, ready tongues to spread it. Thus his virtue was overborne, and he was reckoned an abandoned character. He was 'numbered with the transgressors,' as his true Lord afterwards.

16. *And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home.* 17. *And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me:* 18. *And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.*

Here is Joseph's coat again brought in as a proof. First it was alleged to his father as a proof of his having been torn in pieces; then another time to his master as a proof of his being lost to all shame. Yet neither the garment torn and soiled with blood, nor that which the jealous woman laid up as a proof to ruin him, had a true tale to tell. Joseph himself remained sound in life and pure of heart in spite of these supposed tokens. What is this kind of love which turns so soon into deadly hate? It is not love at all, but selfishness. When I seek to gratify my passion at the expense of a loved object, I do not really love, but hate; it is but a grasping selfishness or covetousness that has falsely borrowed the holy name of Love.

19. *And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled.* 20. *And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.*

Not much honour this, to be imprisoned for having deceived his master, abused the trust confided to him, turned all his good

character to shame. He was now despised and abhorred of all; he had no friends to comfort him—in those days books were scarcely known, the example of saints and martyrs and of their suffering Lord did not exist—no one shared Joseph's belief in God's Providence or his hope of the Divine Promises. Observe, if Joseph had been withheld from sin merely by pride, or by reason, or by any other human motive, he would have been left very desolate now; but he trusted in the living God, and therefore was at peace, though all outward consolation seemed gone. The Apostle felt the same when he said, 'Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.'

21. *But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

O blessed Companion and safe Guide! He who has God with him cannot feel utterly alone, though he may have some dark hours, may have (like Jesus Himself) times of agony, times of feeling forsaken. I read that 'the Lord was with Joseph,' and yet that God's own Son said to His heavenly Father, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Why is this, except to show that Christ Jesus drank the very dregs of the cup, knew all that was worst in trouble? Still at last His

'soul, that seemed
Forsaken, feels her present God again,
And in her Father's arms
Contented, dies away.'

22. *And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.* 23. *The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper.*

Evidently Joseph never claimed credit for himself. His good sense, his success, his trustworthiness, were no subjects of self-complacency: because he always ascribed his good fortune to the Giver of all good. It is, 'the Lord was with him,' 'the Lord made his doings to prosper.' Now, let my prosperity be of that kind that I can safely attribute it to the same blessed source that Joseph did. If I grow rich by deceit, by covetousness, by successful betting or gambling, can I say truly that it is the Lord that has made me prosper?

CHAPTER XL

1. The butler and baker of Pharaoh in prison. 4. Joseph hath charge of them. 5. He interpreteth their dreams. 20. They come to pass according to his interpretation. 23. The ingratitude of the butler.

AND it came to pass after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt. 2. And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers. 3. And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound.

Prisons, too, are in God's Hand, have been inhabited by His Saints, made homes of truth and grace. Let us descend there and see what light God sheds in such dark places. These two great officers must have been mixed up in some grave conspiracy; perhaps they had been accused (one with apparent reason, one without reason) of practising on their master's life. In their deep disgrace they found time for reflection. Once they had been envied by all men, on account of their great charge and their nearness to the monarch; but all, their glory had vanished in a moment. So must my money, my position, the estimation had of my influence, leave me suddenly when I die.

4. And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward.

Joseph had now, after a long imprisonment, attained to be trusted and set above others, though still within the gloomy prison walls. He practised the Apostle's words, 'Remember those in bonds, as bound with them': he remembered what the first days of his own imprisonment had been, and tried by all means to alleviate others' troubles. He, all unknowing, was a figure of that merciful and faithful One Who is 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities,' and was 'tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.'

5. And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison. 6. And Joseph came in unto

them in the morning, and looked upon them, and behold, they were sad. 7. And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to-day?

O strange dream-world, in which fancy holds sway and the soul loses the reins and is tossed hither and thither, as if at random! When dreams plunge me back into foolish or evil memories from which my waking hours are now clear, I will when I awake thank my Emancipator Who alone has delivered me. When dreams foreshadow anything of apparent truth or reality, I will wait for a confirmation in waking hours before I believe them. If I am always ready to learn; if I say, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth,' I shall be able to distinguish true from false guidance.

8. And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you.

Joseph's sympathy gave him a ready key to open hearts, though not to open prison doors. His daily visit brought comfort to the afflicted; they made a friend of him. He looked up to God and sought wisdom thence. It is not to great men or wise that God always commits His message, but to simple hearts that are ready to listen. Joseph always said, 'It is God Who rules, disposes, discloses.' He was encompassed by a constant sense of an abiding Divine Presence. This it is which makes him the closest type of Christ Jesus, in Whom Godhead ever dwells.

9. And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was before me; 10. And in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes: 11. And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

Here was the recollection of the scene in which the dreamer used to play a part, and yet all in impossible order and sequence, as is the wont of dreams. The vine that brings forth at once shoots and flowers and grapes, the grapes which ripen in a moment, and supply wine ready made for Pharaoh's pleasure, what is all this but 'the baseless fabric of a vision'? But with it there was the man's deep persuasion that he would again resume his duties, again return to the uncertain sunshine of royal favour. What could this dream mean?—so clear, so marked, so convincing, that the dreamer woke and could scarcely believe he was not standing by Pharaoh's side!

12. *And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days: 13. Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler.*

In three days glory should issue out of shame, light out of darkness, safety out of danger. So, dear Lord, Thou didst by Thy three days' sojourn in the grave change our spiritual outlook, restore us to heavenly places, give us pardon and peace. Not three whole days between Christ's Passion with its agony and the gladness of Easter night.

14. *But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house.*

Will not the body thus address the soul, 'Remember me, I pray thee, when it shall be well with thee, when thou shalt have passed into the place of light, the realm of peace—forget not thy old and intimate comrade with whom thou wast united on earth, but intercede with the King of kings, that I too may be raised up from corruption and made with thee a partaker of the glorious liberty of the children of God?' Nay, this prayer resembles that of the dying thief: 'Remember me, when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.' It is the prayer of a believer who says, 'Remember, Lord, that I have trusted in Thee, have discerned Thee by faith amidst the shadows of this world, have looked forward to Thy future glorious reign, amidst the apparent confusion and defeat of Thy hidden Providence. I have trusted that Thou dost govern all things well. I ask with righteous Nehemiah, "Remember me, O my God, for good."'

15. *For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.*

Not a word against his brothers, or against his mistress: he does not desire to prove any one in fault, but merely to excite sympathy for his own hapless lot. His motto is that of the Psalmist: 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, and put thy trust in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.' He looks back to Canaan as 'the land of the Hebrews,' for so Abraham and his posterity were called. They were strangers and foreigners, travellers from beyond the River, had no ground of their own; and yet they claimed the land, hoped for it, were laid there in token of that hope.

16. *When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said unto Joseph, I also was in my dream, and behold, I had three white baskets on my head: 17. And in the uppermost basket there was of all manner of bakemeats for Pharaoh; and the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head.*

Alas! that befalls me in reality which came to this hapless baker in the dream. I display the good deeds I have prepared, I do not shelter or protect them by modesty, I let the vultures of human flattery pounce on them and carry them off. Alas! when the great King comes in to hold His supper, my hands will be all empty. Beware, dear friend, of this great danger. What good is it to have laboured to do worthy deeds, if you allow vanity to rob you of all the reward? Rather store safe, and keep to yourself, your precious things; so shall they be preserved safely for the great King's Table, and be His delight.

18. *And Joseph answered and said, This is the interpretation thereof: The three baskets are three days: 19. Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.*

O terrible voice of judgment which will say, 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended,' which will say, 'Get thine house in order, for thou must die'! Joseph, himself a criminal, in the midst between two criminals, foretelling peace to the one, ruin to the other, reminds me of my Lord on the Cross between the two robbers; how He pardoned the one and gave him the most comfortable promise that mortal ears ever heard; how He left the other to die in impenitence. I do not penetrate the mystery of God's judgments, why He bestows life and grace on one, leaves another to go on in his wickedness. But what I observe of them gives me a humble fear, makes me take at once the Divine Hand held out to me, lest I miss it for ever.

20. *And it came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. 21. And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand: 22. But he hanged the chief baker: as Joseph had interpreted to them.*

One day the Great King will make a Feast, 'and gather in all as many as shall be found, both bad and good,' will 'come in to see

the guests,'—nay, 'He will gird Himself and make them sit down to meat and will serve them.' Certainly His friends shall sit with Him 'at His table, in His kingdom.' 'He shall satisfy them with the plenteousness of His house, with the river of His pleasures.' But He will not approve all as worthy to sit there. He will have the Books open. He will observe whether the wedding garment is worn. O great difference, which exceeds all other differences! Can it be that I myself have to stand this test, to be weighed and found false or true? will my Lord then recall what I have been, what I have done? Then let me live in the thought of eternal truths, and pass my life here as an accountable being.

23. *Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.*

How soon I forget, when all smiles on me, the prayers and feelings of my adversity, how I leant on others, needed help, paid earnest prayers and vows, promised all things if I was but well and prosperous again! Yet a deep oblivion has crept over my memory of those days. When my body ached, and I felt every little inconvenience a burden too great to bear, when I depended on the ministration of loving hands, I had many good thoughts, which have left me altogether now that I am well and strong. Before I blame too sharply this forgetful butler, who plunged at once into the duties of his high place and forgot his friend in the prison, I will judge and condemn my own selfishness, which is extreme.

CHAPTER XLI

1. Pharaoh's two dreams. 25. Joseph interpreteth them. 33. He giveth Pharaoh counsel. 38. Joseph is advanced. 50. He begetteth Manasseh and Ephraim. 54. The famine beginneth.

AND *it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and behold, he stood by the river.*

Two long years rolled away, and Joseph seemed forgotten in his prison; but his heavenly Father was not really forgetful of him. He knew what Joseph had to learn, what lessons of humility, of patience, of sympathy prison life could give him. These years laid the foundation of his steadfast wisdom afterwards. They provided a wholesome antidote to the temptations which glory would bring. Let us learn to wait our Father's good time for our deliverance. Let us bear in mind that He is eternal, and that those who trust in Him share in His eternity. They are not

impatient, not confounded at being left to suffer a while. While the butler and all other friends had forgotten Joseph, God remembered him and troubled Pharaoh's slumbers with thoughts that led to his being set free.

2. *And behold, there came up out of the river seven well favoured kine and fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow.*
 3. *And behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill favoured and leanfleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river.* 4. *And the ill favoured and leanfleshed kine did eat up the seven well favoured and fat kine. So Pharaoh awoke.*

Pharaoh was like a god; his providence embraced all Egypt; his glory and honour filled the world. Even his sleeping thoughts turned upon the fertilising river and the well-being of the country. As he slept, the life-giving stream, on which all Egypt depended for its yearly sustenance, seemed to send forth first seven fair and fat kine, then seven poor and lean ones. The latter stood by the former a while, and then set upon them and devoured them. And this dream came with an extraordinary impress of reality. To an Egyptian these two were alike Divine, to be worshipped and prayed to, Pharaoh on his throne, and the beneficent mysterious River. Yet the power of Pharaoh, the resources of the Nile, had alike their limit. Often they failed to help their supplicants. I, thank God, have a better Master, a more unfailing spring!

5. *And he slept and dreamed the second time: and behold, seven ears of corn came up upon one stalk, rank and good.*
 6. *And behold, seven thin ears and blasted with the east wind sprang up after them.* 7. *And the seven thin ears devoured the seven rank and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream.*

Here is a second dream, also very vivid and impressive. Seven rich full ears of corn on one stalk grew up in the meadow beside the king as he stood, and then seven poor blighted ears followed them and seemed to devour them—at least the rich ears vanished and there were only left the poor blighted ears, looking all the blacker and emptier. No promise, no comfort in such a crop as that! I am myself a blade of wheat in God's field, and have no worthiness of my own. My best promise is but poor and blighted. Let me so acknowledge my own vileness, so trust in Divine mercy, that I may be joined to that precious Corn of Wheat that fell and died and brought forth much fruit, became the first-fruit of all earth's harvest uplifted to God's heavenly garner.

8. *And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.*

I would not say that these wise men and magicians were wholly impostors. Nay, they seem to have been honest in declaring that the dream-lesson escaped them. There are many links between things invisible and visible, between spirit and matter which men's hearts investigate wistfully, longing to read the exact meaning. Doubtless, we who have God's Church and God's written Word to guide us, enjoy clearer light than did men of old. But still we need not condemn those who sought to satisfy human craving for some guidance from on high, some voice from above. In the world's childhood God had many ways of teaching men.

9. *Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day: 10. Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, both me and the chief baker:*

'I remember my disgrace,' he said; 'I call to mind the time when I was out of favour, anxious about the future, grieved at my own folly, pining within gloomy prison walls. What the king has said about his dream brings back to my mind these anxious prison-hours, and how it was I got comfort and a ray of light.' What a salutary remembrance it is, now that all prospers with us, to think of the sad hours we had and who helped and sustained us then! Too many people are so dazzled by their brilliant present that they put the dull past entirely out of their thoughts.

11. *And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream.*

12. *And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. 13. And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged.*

That prison became the Interpreter's House. Divine wisdom showed itself through a human voice—there

'The Spirit spake clear as in Israel.'

All fell out just as Joseph had foretold. So one day will the words

of God's servants as to the future end of what now is all come true. Actions and lives will find their true recompense, faith's presages will be justified. So I believe and am sure.

14. Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh.

O joyful day, when God remembered His servant, brought him out from his long captivity, clothed him in festal garments, set him before the king's gracious countenance! A joyful day too was it when God brought His Son out of the gloomy grave, gave Him a resurrection Body, turned all the shame of the Cross into immortal gladness. A joyful day too will it be when Christ's servants shall follow their Master on that same road of joy, as they have along the road of the Cross; when they shall experience the redemption of their body, the final victory of good, eternal security and peace. What a change from this life's prison and dangers!

15. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. 16. And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

It was not in Pharaoh, this Divine satisfying wisdom—nor, not yet, in his councillors; but Joseph too said it was not in him. God only could give light, set doubts to rest. It was from God that Joseph sought and brought his interpretation. He reminds us of the great Apostle who says, 'I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.' I too, dear Lord, should know much, should labour very profitably if I leant only on Thee, referred all things to Thee, had daily experience of Thy light and grace.

17. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river: 18. And behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fatfleshed and well favoured; and they fed in a meadow: 19. And behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured and leanfleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness: 20. And the lean and the ill favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine: 21. And when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them; but

they were still ill favoured, as at the beginning. So I awoke. 22. And I saw in my dream, and behold, seven ears came up in one stalk, full and good: 23. And behold, seven ears, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them: 24. And the thin ears devoured the seven good ears: and I told this unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me.

Here are grave presentiments of evil, monsters that swallow up all the bright apparent promises of good. What is the meaning of those fair beginnings and sad endings? Why should the sacred river, the sustaining earth, send forth first life and then death, and death gain the victory? Nay, O Pharaoh, there is but one land

Where the trees are always green,

one country where the tree of life, the water of life, always satisfy. God's servants dream and think of that country, but cannot apprehend it as yet; it is not here on earth. Life there will more than make up for all that is amiss below.

25. And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what He is about to do.

What a great gift for any king, or for any man, to know what God is about to do! This is a rare blessing, a great favour from above. If we know, we can provide, otherwise we should grope in uncertainty. Dear friend, do not you know what God is about to do? I will tell you. He will certainly send you death, almost certainly sickness. He will certainly judge you according to your works. He will make you live again, after this short life is done. If you practise love and truth, He will make you reap the fruits of it. All this is true and plain and of the utmost importance to you to know.

26. The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; the dream is one. 27. And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. 28. This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do He sheweth unto Pharaoh.

Give me wisdom, Lord, to look onward into the coming time, and make provision for it. While I have health and peace, power to learn, hearts round me to love, opportunities of communion with God, let me store up memories of good, deeds of kindness, hearty

prayers. May be I have to go through dark hours, times of temptation or of loneliness. I shall need then all the fruit of the gracious years I enjoy now.

29. *Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt: 30. And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; 31. And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous.*

The famine will be so great and so universal that men will forget the rich plenty of the prosperous years. Seven years' plenty will have made men think that returns are safe, seasons certain, the yearly fertilising inundation sure to come. No doubt, apart from this vision, the seven years of plenty would have lulled men's minds into entire confidence; but yet how soon all this abundance would be forgotten! The parched fields, the withered trees, the river that would not rise to spread life; all this was to be year after year as if no life or profit should ever return. Just as in a very cold winter we forget all thoughts of summer heat, so would this long intolerable drought banish all thoughts of better days from the nation's heart. It was God's will to lead Egypt through such experiences; first of comfort, then of need.

32. *And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.*

This is like the warning of later Scripture, 'Yet a little while, how little, how little, and He that cometh will surely come and will not tarry.' Faith looks forward a little way. Faith puts aside human conjectures and reasonings, and depends with absolute certainty on the speedy fulfilment of what God has revealed. Yes, 'God will shortly bring it to pass.' I am persuaded of this, I rely on the sure word of my heavenly Friend, Who has never deceived those Who trust Him.

33. *Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years.*

These are Joseph's counsels, for he knew what was coming, and thoroughly believed the Divine warning. First, appoint a wise

intendant, who shall devote himself wholly to taking the requisite measures. Secondly, let the fifth part of the crops be bought up and stored yearly during these good seasons. Thirdly, let granaries for the purpose be established in all the cities, for there they can be well guarded. Thus Joseph wisely thought and counselled; he had a plan ready. How shall I, Lord, obtain a wise and understanding heart able to meet and deal with all circumstances as they arise? In no other way than by prayer and diligence. Let me use all means of instruction I can, and ask God's Spirit to supply my defects.

36. And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine.

Surely the spirit of this verse should be cherished by all who are entering on life. Let me in times of plenty provide against famine. Let me lay by money against sickness. Let me lay by information against the time when I shall have no books or leisure. Let me lay by good thoughts, good texts, good prayers against days of temptation or spiritual drought. God in His mercy sets me in a time of plenty, gives me a mind to store truth, and access to good books and good people. Oh, let me profit by His manifold opportunities! Thanks, dear Lord, for the blessings I enjoy, and grant that I may not waste them.

37. And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. 38. And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? 39. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: 40. Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.

God had showed him future things. God's Spirit spoke in his simplicity and modesty. God had given him grace to persuade kings and wise men of the truth of his warnings. Were not all these signs that he was designed for government, able to carry out into practice the suggestions he had laid down? Here is the call come at last and suddenly. Here is the opportunity for which God had long been preparing His servant.

41. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. 42. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and

arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; 43. And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Here are distinctions which, according to Egyptian custom, accompany Joseph's elevation—a signet ring, a garment of fine linen, a golden collar, a royal chariot, a herald proclaiming his approach and bidding all men bow. How hard it is, dear friends, to keep a humble and lowly heart within when all around have become so obsequious! Did Joseph in his sudden intoxicating grandeur steady himself by any dim thoughts or forecasts of his Divine Lord, Who should one day come on earth and win victory by suffering the greatest humiliation? Anyhow, he called God to mind, and so breathed safely in the dangerous air.

44. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.

This almost royal, almost Divine glory, despots can give and can take away. As the breath of a royal mouth raises a slave to be adored by the world, so a sudden gust of royal displeasure can blow down again, like a house of cards, all that magnificence. Those are happy who retain tranquillity within and are the same before God and before their friends, whether they have lofty titles and royal favour or have lost all these appendages. Christ's glory, His majesty, His kingdom, which never fails, are good subjects of thought and interest for one who is likely to be fascinated with the world's splendours.

45. And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.

A glorious title, which seems to mean 'sustainer of life' or 'preserver of the world'; a bride of high family, who linked Joseph with the Priests of Heliopolis, the richest and most powerful body in Egypt. Such were his honours now, but he remained the same in heart, no less humble, pure, and tender-hearted than of old. In his being cast out from his father's house and taking a Gentile bride, who bare him children, I see a shadow of Him Who was rejected by His own people, and framed to Himself a spiritual Bride from Gentile converts, that Church which is our Spiritual Mother.

46. *And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.*

Joseph set to work to provide against the famine, and for this purpose he was not content to sit at home and wait for heavenly intimations. No; he surveyed thoroughly all the population he had to feed, the cultivated land that was available, the means that existed for storage, the officers who should be responsible to him. He looked into all these things himself, and so was able to frame his plans.

47. *And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls.* 48. *And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same.* 49. *And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering; for it was without number.*

This rich abundance of the fertile soil was the gift primarily of the favouring River, which for seven years rose to that exact height which was needed to shower fertility around. In those seven years it was hard for Egyptians to realise that their prosperity was precarious or likely to alter, hard for them to spare, lay by, deny themselves, in order to provide for the future. Lord, when I am prosperous, when I abound, when all blessings, spiritual and temporal, enrich my heart, let me sometimes remember that famine time may come; let me lay by a store of Thy mercies in the hands of the needy, that their prayers may help me in my trial-hour.

50. *And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On bare unto him.* 51. *And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house.* 52. *And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.*

Joseph 'forgot,' yet not utterly, nor for ever, his childhood's days. Joseph was 'fruitful' and increased, yet still his heart lacked news of his own kindred. He was not wholly taken up with his own comforts. So, too, my Lord in His glory has escaped from suffering and from the burden of human infirmity, but He retains still the

memory of His sufferings here below, the affections of His human heart. All His glory does not make Him less our Brother and our Friend.

53. And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. 54. And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands: but in all the land of Egypt there was bread.

What is the House of Bread, the land of plenty, when in all neighbouring regions scarcity prevails? Whence is it that hungry hearts can be satisfied in their journey through this unsatisfying wilderness? Indeed, the true Joseph has been here, and has laid up a store of grace and truth to which He directs us. Here is sufficient to sustain us until we come to that place where hunger, thirst, and tears can be no more. ;

55. And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread: and Pharaoh said unto all the Egyptians, Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do. 56. And the famine was over all the face of the earth. And Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold unto the Egyptians; and the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt. 57. And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands.

The Church of God, like the land of Egypt, has had its seasons of plenty, and again of scarcity. Times were when miraculous gifts, heavenly graces, fervent missionaries, devout lives abounded: then there came a sad change; the Church became corrupt, divided, slothful; God's Word was rarely and poorly preached; souls were not won nor sought after. O dread and grim famine! Yet even then there were hid den stores of grace, secret holy lives, fervent prayers, some operations of grace, comforts of Divine mercy. Do not doubt but that even in the worst ages God blessed hearts, worked through His ordinances, enlightened by His Spirit. Some souls lived by this Bread even then.

CHAPTER XLII

1. Jacob sendeth his ten sons to buy corn in Egypt. 16. They are imprisoned by Joseph for spies. 18. They are set at liberty, on condition to bring Benjamin. 21. They have remorse for Joseph. 24. Simeon is kept for a pledge. 25. They return with corn, and their money. 29. Their relation to Jacob. 36. Jacob refuseth to send Benjamin.

NOW *when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? 2. And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die.*

Jacob invites his children to go elsewhere for food. He points out to them their own barren fields and the need of buying corn. He sends them to that land of abundance where Joseph rules and dispenses food. He asks why they hesitate to go. Not otherwise do the holy patriarchs and prophets, now with God, plead with their descendants the Jews, invite them to consider their own afflicted state, the loss of temple and sacrifice, the failure of Messianic hopes, the passing of the foretold time; and bid them think where it is that the types and prophecies have found fulfilment, Who it is Who has taken the worship of God, the books of Old Testament Scripture, the hopes and prayers of Jewish faith, and made them into nourishment for the world.

3. And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt. 4. But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said, Lest peradventure mischief befall him. 5. And the sons of Israel came to buy corn among those that came: for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

On Benjamin all Jacob's hopes are set. He dares not trust his darling to the dangers of the way. Joseph, too, thought mostly about Benjamin, was anxious to see him, rejoices at his coming. Benjamin alone was worth (so thought Jacob and Joseph) all the rest of the family. Am I not reminded here of that glorious person of the tribe of Benjamin, 'a Hebrew of the Hebrews,' who was the inheritor of the Pharisees' traditions, and turned them all to the service of Divine grace, who by his words and writings so powerfully won hearts to love the true Joseph?

6. *And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land : and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.* 7. *And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them ; and he said unto them, Whence come ye ? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.* 8. *And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.* 9. *And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies ; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.*

O glorious elevation, dignity which changes Joseph beyond recognition ! Yet still he was their brother, and carried a brother's heart, though he suppressed its tenderness for a while. In their prostration before him he recognised how wonderfully Divine Power had brought all things about. The dreams of his glory had been blotted from Joseph's memory by suffering and by business, but now he recalled them, and their truth flashed on him. Was it not like a dream fulfilled when Christ was exalted from the grave, when Gentile nations were converted, when new continents were won to believe ? Yet Christ has done all this, and He still reigns. What can we do better than worship and trust Him ?

10. *And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come.* 11. *We are all one man's sons ; we are true men, thy servants are no spies.* 12. *And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.*

Joseph and the Egyptians were on their guard against spies, who might pretend they were in need and on the road to purchase corn, but were in reality planning a hostile expedition against the enfeebled realm. So Christ's Apostles kept their eyes open to discern 'false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty, which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.' Such there were in Apostolic days who pretended to be Christians that they might enslave Christian hearts and steal them from Christ. Let us who are believers guard the faith and the souls committed to us ; let us remember that we live in a state of war, and enemies are hidden near.

13. *And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan ; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.* 14. *And*

Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies: 15. Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither. 16. Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies. 17. And he put them all together into ward three days.

This accusation, which Joseph himself did not believe, these threats, this harsh treatment, are but a pretence, a means to an end. Joseph earnestly desired to find out how his brethren were disposed towards Benjamin, if they regretted their fault towards himself, how they would come out of trial. He stifled the love that was in his heart, and forced himself to assume a suspicious and wrathful aspect. Do not accuse Joseph of severity, but learn to recognise in many seemingly harsh dealings of God His Fatherly mercy, though for a while disguised. He means good to you in the end. Only trust Him.

18. And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God: 19. If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses: 20. But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so.

‘I fear God’—this is a comfortable word. It assures the brothers that they have not fallen under the power of a ruthless tyrant. ‘I fear God,’ therefore I must practise justice and mercy. ‘The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.’ This fear does not exclude love; it is a humble, trustful fear, carries with it a conscientious desire to approve one’s-self in God’s sight. Let us try to bring up the children in God’s ‘perpetual fear and love.’ That is a profitable education. What else can take the place of this sobering, inspiring awe of the Most High?

21. And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. 22. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.

Here we see the effect of that faith in God and knowledge of duty in which Jacob’s family had been brought up. His sons had thrown

aside much of the good teaching they had had, but it remained deep in their hearts; it came to light now under pressure. When the boy was in their power they had stifled brotherly feeling, but now they remembered what the Voice of God and of nature was saying all the time. Did not some of the Jews who had crucified Christ Jesus, and had said, 'His Blood be on us and on our children,' come to the Apostles with pierced hearts and recall the Passion, and say, 'What shall we do?' Will not the Lord require an account from me of the souls I have injured, the prayers I have not heeded, the necessities I have left unrelieved?

23. And they knew not that Joseph understood them: for he spake unto them by an interpreter. 24. And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes.

Various feelings strove in Joseph's heart—the recollection of the painful past, thankfulness for his own safety, joy at his brothers' evident penitence, reviving goodwill and tenderness for them—all these found vent in tears. An interpreter stood between them and him, receiving their petitions in Hebrew and transmitting them to Joseph in the Egyptian tongue, and in like manner reporting Joseph's commands to them; but there was no real need of such an official, the true Joseph understood his brethren well. There are many to whom the Scripture is written in a strange tongue, has no message. Who will give the help to open it and make its words sound familiar and intelligible to hearts? Where shall we find a faithful interpreter to render its accents plain?

25. Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them. 26. And they laded their asses with the corn, and departed thence.

Here is a fresh test devised by Joseph. He returned the money that had been paid, wishing thus to render his brothers doubtful as to their real position; he wished their independence to be shaken. They had not been present when the wheat was put into their sacks and the sacks closed up, all this they had had to take on trust. Not otherwise does God deal with us. He bids us give all we have, and yet imparts His grace freely. He threatens and yet comforts, reproaches us with the past and yet loads us with mercies, troubles our peace that He may prepare us for full reconciliation. There is about His dealings with us something of mystery, something beyond our power to analyse.

27. *And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the inn, he espied his money ; for, behold, it was in his sack's mouth.* 28. *And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored ; and lo, it is even in my sack : and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us ?*

‘What is this that God hath done unto us?’ In these words the sons of Jacob recognise God’s chastening and guiding hand. They feel that God has been with them on their journey, overruling and providing. They begin to see that His gracious ends are being worked out by what seemed chance. So may I, Lord, have eyes to discern Thy working, a heart to ponder over the meaning of the experiences of joy or sorrow which Thou preparest for me. Thou art leading me on step by step.

29. *And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of Canaan, and told him all that befell unto them ; saying,* 30. *The man, who is the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.* 31. *And we said unto him, We are true men ; we are no spies :* 32. *We be twelve brethren, sons of our father ; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.* 33. *And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men ; leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone :* 34. *And bring your youngest brother unto me : then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are true men : so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffick in the land.*

They tell their tale in truth and simplicity as ‘Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile.’ Some years previously they had devised false tales to gain their own ends, had scrupled at no violence or treachery that might serve them ; but now they have reached mature age, God has been teaching them His ways, fitting them to found His Old Testament Church. The knowledge of God and His statutes which they had acquired as boys had lain long forgotten, but now it begins to bear some fruit. Their father, whom they had deceived before, finds now that he can trust them.

35. *And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack : and when both they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid.* 36. *And Jacob their father said unto them, Me*

have ye bereaved of my children : Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away : all these things are against me.

The sight of the money renewed suspicion in Jacob's mind. He had never believed his sons' account of Joseph's end, and he begins now to fear lest Simeon's disappearance should be in some way caused by his brothers' avarice or double-dealing. Being, as he always was, of a moderate, wary temper, now further sobered by the assaults of age, he made no overt accusation, but we can see what was in his mind. He says, 'All these things are against me,' meaning that his fatherly heart is torn with trouble. He has lost, or is losing, his dear ones, and attributes this to the coldness and indifference of his other children. Those to whom God gives the precious gift of children of their own will find, as with all God's gifts on earth, that there comes with them an added vulnerability, a capacity for untold troubles through what we love so dearly.

37. And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee : deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again.

Reuben will stake what he cares for most—he pledges his own two sons for Benjamin's safety. When Joseph was in danger, Reuben interceded and planned to deliver him, but ineffectually—nothing came of his good intentions. But now, when Benjamin is to be ventured as the last hope of the family, Reuben will guard him at the price of what he holds dearer than life. Grace has changed his mind, has given him more firmness and courage than of old.

38. And he said, My son shall not go down with you ; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone : if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

Benjamin was the only pledge left to Jacob to remind him of his dear and entirely beloved Rachel. Such is the sufficient explanation of his father's exceeding tenderness for him ; but grave writers, meditating on all this history, have been wont to look deeper than the letter. They trace in Joseph sold, betrayed, exalted a living figure of Christ Jesus ; and in Benjamin, a figure of those Jews who should one day lay aside all the prejudices that they had been brought up in, and seek Jesus as their Saviour, be joined again thus to the Patriarchs and Prophets who worship Mary's Son as their true Lord,—a happy day indeed when Benjamin and Joseph are thus reunited.

CHAPTER XLIII

1. Jacob is hardly persuaded to send Benjamin. 15. Joseph entertaineth his brethren. 31. He maketh them a feast.

AND the famine was sore in the land. 2. And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, Go again, buy us a little food.

This famine in the land recalls to us the prophetic warning: 'Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. . . . They shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and they shall not find it' (Amos viii. 11). Many souls in these days are hungry and athirst; they desire truth and cannot find it; they find nothing on which their souls can live. Oh that we could lead them to that Living Bread, in Whom alone is all truth, all wisdom!

3. And Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. 4. If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food: 5. But if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down: for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you.

'The man said,' and his word will be accomplished. To 'see the man's face' is life. 'The man' can set free, can reconcile, can give abundance—all will go well with us if we are in his favour. With these thoughts the sons of Jacob have laid aside all their former selfishness, all their former guile; they will adopt no plan but the straightforward one of going to this unknown lord and carrying out his demands. They are ready for the good of their household to venture themselves on his justice and mercy. Thus it is that the invisible Divine Truth, not yet incarnate, which shone in Joseph's person, awed and yet attracted.

6. And Israel said, Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother? 7. And they said, The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother?

and we told him according to the tenor of these words : could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down ?

Was it their imprudence ? Could they have done better otherwise ? How is it that they alone have fared so ill in Egypt where other strangers got a welcome ? No ; their words were true, their conduct without reproach. It was all of God's bringing about, for wise reasons as yet hidden from them ; they have no cause to blame themselves. May I, in troubles and disasters, have such consolation ; be able to ascribe all to God, and discern His working ; not have my sorrows embittered by the recollection that my own folly has caused them.

8. And Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go ; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. 9. I will be surety for him ; of my hand shalt thou require him : if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever : 10. For except we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time.

Judah's words ring true. He deserved to have charge of Benjamin for the love and courage he showed. Jacob's confiding his darling to him on this profession reminds us of Christ's words to S. Peter, 'Lovest thou Me ?' then 'Feed My sheep,' 'Feed My lambs.' Christ is willing to trust the souls He has bought with His blood to the care of those pastors who sincerely love Him and love His people. This is the most needful requirement for the sacred ministry. If I have no love I shall do no good, only fail miserably and lose the treasure confided to me ; if I have love, the greatest difficulties will not utterly confound me.

11. And their father Israel said unto them, If it must be so now, do this ; take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds :

Jacob and his family were suffering privation, yet he would not let them go before the ruler of Egypt with empty hands. S. Paul's converts were like this, 'Their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality' (2 Cor. viii. 2). These gifts are not meant to enrich Joseph, who was wealthy, but they are a token of duty and affection, a specimen of the best that Jacob's family had to offer, some of them remedies of value. They remind us that the spiritual barrenness of Jacob's family has passed, and that they have good fruits of repentance to show.

12. *And take double money in your hand ; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand ; peradventure it was an oversight :*
13. *Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man :*
14. *And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.*

Jacob sees now that he need not be afraid for his dear Benjamin ; his brothers, at least, may be safely trusted with him. He sends him to the unknown Prince of whom the brothers have said so many things, who seems so strangely interested in the family, whose power over them is so absolute. In Jacob's words may be understood the longing which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have that their children should find mercy with the true Joseph, that He should forget all their faults, receive them into His eternal inheritance. Jacob ventures all his sons, all the hopes of his house, and by doing this he gains life, riches, peace for them all at the hands of their great Benefactor.

15. *And the men took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin ; and rose up, and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.* 16. *And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the ruler of his house, Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready ; for these men shall dine with me at noon.* 17. *And the man did as Joseph bade ; and the man brought the men into Joseph's house.*

Joseph discerned them at once in the crowd of those who came for corn, but he took no notice of them openly, concealed his love under a seeming indifference, moved away to his other business as if he had taken no heed ; yet all the while he was preparing a hearty welcome. His brethren would have rejoiced if they had known his intentions, but as yet they knew them not. Does not God deal with sinners somewhat in this way ? He fills them with fear, conceals His love for a while, that He may bring them to feel their own unworthiness, their entire dependence on Him, the great debt they owe His justice.

18. *And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house ; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in ; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses.* 19. *And they came near to the*

steward of Joseph's house, and they communed with him at the door of the house, 20. And said, O sir, we came indeed down at the first time to buy food: 21. And it came to pass, when we came to the inn, that we opened our sacks, and behold, every man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight: and we have brought it again in our hand. 22. And other money have we brought down in our hands to buy food: we cannot tell who put our money in our sacks.

These apprehensions are vain. They have really nothing to fear from so merciful, so gracious a lord; yet he was not unwilling to lead them through such an experience. He would rather see them thus than that they should enter his house with confident gaze and haughty attitude. He would teach them first a holy fear that they may win their way to undoubted confidence afterwards. Those make a great mistake who think to approach God with nothing about them of the element of fear.

23. And he said, Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them.

This Egyptian certainly belongs to the true Israel. He encourages the children of promise, speaks to them of their father's God, reunites them to their imprisoned brother, is ready to serve them in all ways. He attributes the happy recovery of their money to the Providence of God, not intending thereby to deceive them, but viewing God as inspiring hearts and giving orders through men's ministry. It was, indeed, by Joseph's orders that this had been done, but God had so appointed, and they had Him to thank for it.

24. And the man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their asses provender. 25. And they made ready the present against Joseph came at noon: for they heard that they should eat bread there.

They must have felt like S. Peter when he had been released from the prison (Acts xii. 9), 'He wist not that it was true, . . . but thought he saw a vision.' All seemed too promising, too hopeful, to be real. They still awaited anxiously the arrival of the great lord who had invited them; they felt that all their welfare depended on his dispositions towards them. There was still something in his treatment of them which they could not understand. Meanwhile, they arranged their presents to the best advantage, and thought only how to please him.

26. *And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth.* 27. *And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?* 28. *And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance.*

I am reminded in reading these verses of Christ's return from the grave, of His meeting His brethren with salutations of peace, of their mingled fear and joy. They cry out, 'My Lord and my God'; they adore and trust, though with a trembling joy, with something of distance between them and their Master since He has left mortality. Jacob himself comes forward on this occasion to venerate Joseph, not in person, but through the instrumentality of his sons. Joseph is one of them, yet exalted so high that the brethren fall before him in all humility. They have learnt to rely on him as their only hope.

29. *And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son.* 30. *And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber and wept there.* 31. *And he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread.*

Joseph's heart seems set on Benjamin alone. He separates him from the rest by special notice, blessing, attentions. Of Benjamin's own behaviour we are told nothing. He is brought forward, not for any merits of his own, but because of his brother's undiscerning, unprompted love. Could not Joseph, one asks, have received his brethren and made himself known to them directly? Why all these delays and disguises? So it is asked concerning Christ's work; why did our dear Lord spend such labour and pains on redeeming us, He Who has all hearts, all means, in His hand? Nay, He has His reasons. The way of tears which He trod, the long series of His Passion, the process and method of our conversion, all have their due place. Let us trust so wise a Brother, let us seek His blessing and guidance.

32. *And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians, which did eat with him, by themselves: because the Egyptians might not eat bread with*

the Hebrews ; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians. 33. *And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth : and the men marvelled one at another.* 34. *And he took and sent messes unto them from before him : but Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of theirs. And they drank, and were merry with him.*

In the land of Canaan they had left scarcity, every morsel was measured out ; here in Joseph's house is abundance and good cheer. May I not see in this a hint of the barrenness of the Old Testament Scriptures apart from Christ ? Without Him as their way, their end, their hope, a sort of blankness comes over the Old Testament History—what came of it ? What was God leading His people towards ? The Jews who ignore the hope of Israel find left to them but the husk, the difficulties, commencements which end in nothing. Believers whom Christ welcomes to His table of Divine Truth see there the fulness of all those hints and figures and yearnings which were on the lips of saints and prophets in old time. It is the happy experience of some souls 'o have found out all this, though for a while they knew it not. On reading their Bible they can say, 'Once I was blind, now I see.'

CHAPTER XLIV

1. Joseph's policy to stay his brethren. 14. Judah's humble supplication to Joseph.

AND he commanded the steward of his house, saying, *Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put every man's money in his sack's mouth.* 2. *And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest, and his corn money.* And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken.

In this last trial which Joseph steels himself to inflict on his brethren, I recognise his earnest desire to see how they would treat Benjamin,—whether they would prefer their own safety to his, whether they had really won anything of true self-sacrificing love. He finds, and is delighted to find, that they come out well. Joseph's steward must have been told, or have guessed, the secret of his master's dealings with the strangers ; at least, he seems to fulfil the instructions he had received as if he had penetrated their meaning.

What is this cup hidden in the wheat? A mystical cup, the discovery of which brings sorrow and shame, which pledges the holder of it to bondage? It represents the same cup of sorrow out of which Joseph himself had drunk, the bitter cup which was put to Christ's own lips first, and comes round to us in our turn. It is offered to us, in a mystery, along with the Bread of Life. There we receive what pledges us to patience and yet to hope.

3. *As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their asses.* 4. *And when they were gone out of the city, and not yet far off, Joseph said unto his steward, Up, follow after the men; and when thou dost overtake them, say unto them, Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good?* 5. *Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth? ye have done evil in so doing.*

All this time the brothers' eyes had been holden, like those of the two who went to Emmaus. Joseph made trial of their sentiments just as the risen Lord did of the doubting imperfect faith of His friends. Ought not the brothers to have known Joseph, the two disciples to have recognised their Master long before they did? Sufficient tokens and signs of love had been given in either case, but still the cloud remained between till God's moment had come. Joseph's accusation, that the brothers, or one of them, had stolen his precious silver divining cup, seems strange for two reasons; first, that the charge was untrue, and he knew it to be so. Again, how could he who was inspired by heavenly wisdom imitate Egyptian magicians in divining by looking into the cup? I reply that it was allowable for him to invent this device to test his brothers' hearts; he did not mean to employ lasting deception. And again, that he did not really use the cup for magic purposes; it was merely a phrase to exalt its preciousness.

6. *And he overtook them, and he spake unto them these same words.* 7. *And they said unto him, Wherefore saith my lord these words? God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing:* 8. *Behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought again unto thee out of the land of Canaan: how then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold?* 9. *With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen.* 10. *And he said, Now also let it be according unto your words: he with whom it is found shall be my servant; and ye shall be blameless.*

This faithful servant speaks Joseph's own message; he comforts, or he threatens, or he discriminates, exactly as his master would have

him. He says 'my servant,' using his master's exact words. Oh that those who take to mankind the message of the true Joseph did so with equal faithfulness, never 'making the heart of the righteous sad,' never 'strengthening the hands of the wicked'! Give, Lord, to Thy ministers such discernment of heart that they may know when to speak of Thy terrors, when of Thy love.

11. *Then they speedily took down every man his sack to the ground, and opened every man his sack.* 12. *And he searched, and began at the eldest, and left at the youngest: and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.* 13. *Then they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city.*

O dread discovery! confounding even for innocence. They knew not whether to condemn Benjamin, or to trust his protestations and air of innocence. They felt themselves entangled in a web of trouble from which they could see no outlet. Certainly it is admirable to see with what patience, courage, and sympathy for their endangered brother, they faced the situation. They were not like those Corinthians whom S. Paul reproved for their self-righteousness in the presence of sin, to whom he said, 'Your glorying is not good; know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?' No, these took the crime as their own, and atoned for it in penitence.

14. *And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house; for he was yet there: and they fell before him on the ground.*

They are not jealous of Benjamin, in spite of the favour which Joseph had shown him. They do not treat him with indifference because his mother was not their mother. They cast themselves at Joseph's feet confessing themselves criminals, though they are innocent, entreating for their young brother as if his life and liberty are dearer than their own. The Church would flourish indeed if believers interceded thus humbly with Christ Jesus on behalf of erring and misguided souls.

15. *And Joseph said unto them, What deed is this that ye have done? wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?* 16. *And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found.* 17. *And he said, God forbid that I should do so:*

but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant: and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father.

Joseph professes that he can divine with prophetic art, that he has found out the criminal, and can punish him justly and him only; and Judah does not attempt to defend himself or his brothers, but takes, as it were, all the fault on himself. Nay, he speaks in our person; it is we who say, 'How shall we speak, or how shall we clear ourselves?' 'God hath found out the iniquity of Thy servants.' We owe a great debt to God's justice; our own righteousness is unable to satisfy him. We do not find any innocence or worthiness of our own that we can allege. Feeling thus, speaking thus, we become worthy to receive His infinite and undeserved mercy. He gives us that pardon which we need and yet dare not claim.

18. Then Judah came near unto him, and said, O my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh.

Joseph listened to Judah's speech, and marvelled at the tender, almost paternal love which he had for Benjamin, a self-sacrificing venturing love that would dare and suffer all to rescue his young brother. He marvelled, but it was not his gift, he did not inspire it; but the true Joseph, Christ our Saviour, Himself imparts to us what love we have. When He rewards us, it is His own gift He rewards. Joseph appears here 'even as Pharaoh'; he has royal power to give or take away liberty and life. He who was once sold, oppressed, forgotten, is now a sharer in sovereign power. He reminds us of the text, 'Even as the Father raiseth the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son also quickeneth whom He will; that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father.'

19. My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father or a brother? 20. And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him. 21. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. 22. And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die. 23. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest

brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more. 24. And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. 25. And our father said, Go again, and buy us a little food. 26. And we said, We cannot go down: if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother be with us. 27. And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons: 28. And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I saw him not since: 29. And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

This is a simple and touching history, in which Judah relates just what had been really said and done, but with a view to melt the heart of the unknown lord on whom his fate depended. Jacob's prolonged old age, his vivid remembrance of his dearly beloved Rachel, his tender regard for the sons she had given him, his great reluctance to risk his sole remaining darling amidst strangers, all these are well set forth. Judah shows how great weight Joseph's commands had had with him; they had prevailed against the aged father's scruples, had resulted in the younger brother being brought down in the hope that he might find a favourable welcome. Judah had been told that he would not be acceptable without Benjamin, therefore he had brought him in obedience, trusting, for his sake, to be accepted.

30. Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life; 31. It shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave.

What a change in Judah! We have known him under other circumstances, and known ill of him; but now he appears willing to give up all sooner than distress his father. His whole soul is touched with his father's anxiety, so that he thinks nothing of his own risk. Surely, if we had known Judah, we should have forgiven all his past faults for the sake of his present love. This is what Christ the Lord does with the contrite soul. He takes away evil, and brings in good. He wipes out the past, and fills the heart with devotion which renews it wholly. He imputes not the former sins of any who sincerely seek His kingdom.

'Who trust in Him, their guilt is gone' (Ps. xxxiv. 22).—KEBLE.

32. *For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever.* 33. *Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren.* 34. *For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father.*

We see in Judah the image of a true pastor, who has to give account for souls, who pleads for each with God, who ventures himself to save his brethren, who fears his Father's reproach if any soul is lost. We have in his words an echo of S. Paul's saying, 'I could wish to be accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.' The Apostle could not bear to enjoy Divine grace and favour without his dear countrymen. Their souls were more precious to him than his own. It is such accents as these which form a prevailing prayer.

CHAPTER XLV

1. Joseph maketh himself known to his brethren. 5. He comforteth them in God's providence. 9. He sendeth for his father. 16. Pharaoh confirmeth it. 21. Joseph furnisheth them for their journey, and exhorteth them to concord. 25. Jacob is revived with the news.

THEN *Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.*

Judah, when he spoke so touchingly, so convincingly, did not know to whom he was speaking. He thought that he was before a severe judge, but it was in reality a loving brother. He thought that he had cruelty to fear, and in reality there was only kindness, which was with difficulty restrained from showing itself. Compare this position with our own when we come before Christ our Saviour, full of the burden of our sins, humbly imploring His mercy. He desires that we should be pardoned more than we ourselves desire it. His warnings and terrors are in love. He has led us through rough ways on purpose that we might learn to love Him. Let us so blend together awe of His majesty and trust of His mercy that He may show us all the tenderness of His Divine Heart.

2. *And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard.*

Joseph remained alone with his eleven brethren, revealed himself graciously to them, soothed their dismay, manifested to them his love, sent them to do his commission. Where is it we read 'Him hath God raised up and showed openly, not unto all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose?' This interview, like that one, was reserved for brethren alone; but soon the news of it spread everywhere, and it was told what Joseph or what Christ Jesus had said to their brethren at their meeting. We, too, can assist by faith at the apparition of the Risen Saviour, and can bear the news of it to other hearts.

3. *And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.*

'They were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.' This could not be the real living brother of their youth! How changed, too, was he! in what a position! how different from the brother they knew! I see here the feeling of the disciples at the beginning of the forty days when fear still strove with joy in them; or the feelings of Saul when he found that the supposed Impostor, against Whose disciples he had been raging, was indeed the Heavenly King, the Hope of Israel.

4. *And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.*

'Behold, that it is I myself.' 'Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?' Christ thus tenderly soothed the fears, encouraged the faith of His disciples after His return from the dead. So does He still reveal Himself to doubting souls, enlightens them by degrees, makes them see the error in which they have lived, the Love against which they have been fighting.

5. *Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.*

Our Divine Brother is better than Joseph, and can Himself impart the peace and trust which Joseph recommends. He shows us our fault, but at the same time reveals His mercy. He shows how

Divine Providence draws good out of evil, how His truth is confirmed even by our errors, how it was needful for our salvation that we should acknowledge who and what we are, and thus seek for mercy. This is, indeed, a wonderful discovery when we see how our sins have been overruled to our salvation—we learn to abhor ourselves, but yet to realise the blessings of penitence, the full grace and pity of our God.

6. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. 7. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

The long drought, the universal distress, the hopelessness of escape otherwise, made all people depend on Joseph's store, seek his favour; his foresight was so keen, his supplies so great. If I, apart from the true Joseph, consider my condition, I should utterly despair. I have no spiritual resources, no treasure of grace, no inward righteousness, but I put my trust in Him Who can well supply me. He can bring me, who am utterly vile and foolish, into His glorious kingdom, where I shall marvel to find myself.

8. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Forget your own part in all this, think only of the good which God has wrought out through your means. 'Through ignorance ye did it . . . but what God hath foreshowed by the mouth of His prophets . . . He hath so fulfilled'; these are S. Peter's words (Acts iii. 17), speaking of a greater crime and greater triumph than Joseph's history had to show. How wonderful is the order of God's Providence, wherein, in a manner beyond our understanding, He makes all things serve to His servants' good! All things, even crimes, vices, enemies, cruelties, follies, are thus by an astonishing alchemy made to produce the gold of true love and increase the number of rescued souls.

9. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: 10. And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy

flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: 11. And there will I nourish thee: for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.

The time of grace has come, suspicions and difficulties have disappeared in a moment. No need now for Benjamin or Judah to fear bondage or deprecate faults. No need now to seek anxiously and at cost for corn to take home. Joseph takes all their cares on himself, all his power and bounty are pledged to them; all that is needed now is to send forth the news of reconciliation. 'How beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth glad tidings of good things!' Now that I know where the Living Bread is to be found, now that I have been welcomed by my Exalted Brother, and know how great is His goodness, let me tell this glad news and win all men to share it.

12. And behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you.

13. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.

'Your eyes see.' What you thought were empty dreams have turned out true; he whom you thought an enemy is a friend; what you did lightly and carelessly was a cruel fault bringing grave consequences. God's Divine hidden will disposing evil to good, which you never thought of, has now become manifest. Let us, Lord, have eyes to see ourselves as we are, and at the same time Thee as Thou art. Thus alone shall we bear the sight of our own folly, being consoled by the light of Thy gracious Face.

14. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Our sins are come to our knowledge, we have crucified Christ by our own sinfulness; yet remember that He is full of Divine compassion, that His Blood is so powerful, His tenderness so great, that all the evil we have done shall no more be mentioned if we repent of it. He will make it as though it had not been; His word of forgiveness is all-powerful; perfect love will at last cast out fear. What did this gracious brother converse of with his reconciled brethren? I know not,

nor do I know much of what the Lord said to the beloved disciple, or to the eleven after the Resurrection, nor am I told what the Blessed in Heaven say and do ; but peace, trust, love, are real and revive hearts. In this life we but taste drops of them, but the fulness is elsewhere.

16. And the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, Joseph's brethren are come : and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants.

It is good news that Israel should at last find Joseph, should recognise him for their brother, should rejoice in his love. If their alienation has brought good results, what will not their reconciliation do? 'If their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles ; how much more their fulness?' 'If the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?' (Rom. xi. 12, 15).

17. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Say unto thy brethren, This do ye ; lade your beasts, and go, get you unto the land of Canaan ; 18. And take your father and your households, and come unto me : and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land. 19. Now thou art commanded, this do ye ; take you wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father, and come.

Are not these words like those of the Evangelical Prophet, who thus concludes his great prophecy of Israel's restoration—'And they shall bring your brethren out of all nations for an offering to the Lord, upon horses, upon chariots, upon litters, upon mules, and upon swift beasts?' (Isa. lxvi. 20.) Will not the end of time see a gathering together of God's ancient people to His Divine Son, their Redeemer? The Jews remain still after all these centuries a separate people, retaining the vestiges and relics of their old faith, awaiting God's designs of mercy. Will not the time come for Him to redeem their captivity and make them recognise His salvation?

20. Also regard not your stuff ; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours.

They must make a sacrifice. Their removal from Canaan involves some loss. Well, it is worth facing for the glories and advantages of their new settlement. So S. Paul says, 'What things were gain for me, those I counted loss for Christ.' 'I suffered the loss of all things, and count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in Him.' So it is with all those who accept God's

gracious offer and seek the face of the true Joseph. They have to give up some pleasures, some advantages, but God will abundantly recompense them.

21. *And the children of Israel did so : and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way. 22. To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment ; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment. 23. And to his father he sent after this manner ; ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way.*

Joseph first welcomed his brethren, then clothed and enriched them. He received and acknowledged them as they were, and afterwards clothed their poverty and shabbiness with the gifts of his own munificence. Not otherwise does Christ Jesus deal with us. He accepts our nothingness, our vileness, that He may clothe us with His abundant grace. He acknowledges us for His brethren, calls us to a kingdom, though we deserve it not. Joseph sent presents to his father, as his father had previously sent presents to him (xlii. 11) ; but those were spared out of poverty, tokens of respect, the best Jacob could offer, these are overflowings of Joseph's abundance, enough to sustain Jacob and all his household. Let us offer to our Divine Lord willingly and cheerfully of what we have, secure that we shall be no losers. Who can doubt His wealth or His bountifulness?

24. *So he sent his brethren away, and they departed : and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way.*

Be not jealous of any preference that I have shown to Benjamin ; be not anxious to throw off on each other your own share of responsibility for ill-using me of old ; be not ambitious as regards your new establishment. No, you are beloved ; rest on and trust in that love ; rejoice in your newly-won peace, and hasten to carry home the tidings of it. This is good news, and sufficient for you, to know that all is now peace, all is secure, plenty and repose await you. Be only concerned to carry out the orders which I have given you.

25. *And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, 26. And told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not.*

What a difference between this news of joy and the sad message witnessed to by the bloodstained coat with which they had before

saddened their father's heart ! Yes ; and in themselves, too, the difference was great. They had now got rid of their jealousy, their violence, their falsehood. With them, too, all things have become new, so that they are fitted to impart this new hope. Glad tidings ! he whom we thought dead lives and reigns ; all his humiliation has turned into glory. Nature is unable at first to grasp this astonishing revelation.

27. *And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them : and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived :*

Jacob speaks of his sons much as the Christians at Damascus about Saul when they said, 'He now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.' Jacob rejoices to see that all his family are turned to Joseph now, trust him, love him, depend on him. So may it be with the whole house of Israel ; may they be united with believers of old time in acknowledgment of that Messiah Whom they have so long despised.

28. *And Israel said, It is enough ; Joseph my son is yet alive : I will go and see him before I die.*

This is Jacob's 'Nunc Dimittis,' 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.' Joseph, too, had become 'a light to lighten the Gentiles' before he was recognised as the 'glory of God's people Israel.' Jacob felt now that God had been indeed true and gracious to him. He looked forward to great mercies yet, of which his dear son's exaltation was but the figure. He disposed himself to take the step of entering Egypt, secure that when he made one more change thence and entered the unseen world, there, too, his faithful Guide would not be lacking.

CHAPTER XLVI

1. Jacob is comforted by God at Beer-sheba. 5. Thence he with his company goeth into Egypt. 8. The number of his family that went into Egypt. 29. Joseph meeteth Jacob. 31. He instructeth his brethren how to answer to Pharaoh.

AND Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beer-sheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. 2. And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I.

Jacob had in his youth beheld God's gracious Face at Bethel ; there he had first learned to believe and trust. Again, in mature age,

in a time of great anguish and fear, he had wrestled at Penuel with the 'traveller unknown' Whose Name and Face were hidden from him; there he had won peace and reconciliation through strife. Now at the end of his life he has another vision, one suited to his present need. God enlightens and cheers his age by a gracious promise. God bids him 'fear not.' God promises that His mercy shall not forsake Jacob's family. God meets his unspoken questioning and bids him boldly leave the land of promise, to return again in due time.

3. *And He said, I am God, the God of thy father : fear not to go down into Egypt ; for I will there make of thee a great nation.*

Is not this like the vision which S. Paul had in his hour of need (Acts xxiii. 11), when the Lord stood by him and said, 'Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast certified of Me at Jerusalem, so shalt thou bear witness also at Rome?' Paul too was leaving the Holy Land never to return. He was going to mighty Rome, which had succeeded to Egypt's power among nations. His prospects were uncertain, and even terrible; yet his Divine Lord promised him succour and fulfilled His word. He became the spiritual father of innumerable souls whom he won through his very exile. Is it not the same Lord Who speaks to Jacob in the one place, to Paul in the other?

4. *I will go down with thee into Egypt ; and I will also surely bring thee up again : and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.*

Do not fear to forsake Canaan and live in Egypt; God will be there, Joseph will be there. Egypt will become a land of promise under such a Guide, with such a Protector. Death indeed will surely come, but with a gentle aspect. Death will bring round thee loving hearts, faithful prayers, thoughts of God's mercy in the past and foreshadowings of the same mercy as lasting on beyond the grave. Death with Joseph by would have no terrors. So I feel regarding my own end. I look towards my Divine Brother exalted for me. I say to death,

'Little skills it where or how,
If thou comest then or now,
With a smooth or angry brow—
Come thou must, and we must die—
Jesu, Saviour, stand Thou by
When that last sleep seals our eye.'

5. *And Jacob rose up from Beer-sheba : and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and*

their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. 6. And they took their cattle, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob, and all his seed with him: 7. His sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters, and all his seed brought he with him into Egypt.

God had said to Isaac (xxvi. 2, 3), 'Go not down into Egypt; sojourn in the land, and I will be with thee and bless thee'; but now He bids Jacob pursue a different plan. As his father had trusted and obeyed, so does the son, sure that it is the same God Who speaks, though His command is different. Jacob took into Egypt a small company, but from it sprang a great multitude, a mighty nation. Joseph's brethren and kinsfolk were but few, but they contained in them the pledge of generations to come who should believe and hope as they did. Christ Jesus after His Resurrection had also comparatively few of His own nation to believe in Him, but Scripture speaks of a time still future when 'all Israel' shall be gathered in to their true hope.

8. And these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons: Reuben, Jacob's first-born. 9. And the sons of Reuben; Hanoch, and Phallu, and Hezron, and Carmi. 10. And the sons of Simeon; Jemuel, and Jamin, and Ohad, and Jachin, and Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanitish woman. 11. And the sons of Levi; Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 12. And the sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah, and Pharez, and Zerah: but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Pharez were Hezron and Hamul. 13. And the sons of Issachar; Tola, and Phuvah, and Job, and Shimron. 14. And the sons of Zebulun; Sered, and Elon, and Jahleel. 15. These be the sons of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob in Padan-aram, with his daughter Dinah: all the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty and three. 16. And the sons of Gad; Ziphion, and Haggi, Shuni, and Ezbon, Eri, and Arodi, and Aveli. 17. And the sons of Asher; Jimnah, and Ishuah, and Isui, and Beriah, and Sherah their sister: and the sons of Beriah; Heber, and Malchiel. 18. These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter, and these she bare unto Jacob, even sixteen souls. 19. The sons of Rachel Jacob's wife; Joseph and Benjamin. 20. And

unto Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, which Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On bare unto him. 21. And the sons of Benjamin were Belah, and Becher, and Ashbel, Gera, and Naaman, Ehi, and Rosh, Muphim, and Huphim, and Ard. 22. These are the sons of Rachel, which were born to Jacob: all the souls were fourteen. 23. And the sons of Dan; Hushim. 24. And the sons of Naphtali; Jahzeel, and Guni, and Jezer, and Shillem. 25. These are the sons of Bilhah, which Laban gave unto Rachel his daughter, and she bare these unto Jacob: all the souls were seven. 26. All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were threescore and six; 27. And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten.

Here are God's people enumerated for the first time. Here is the list of those who founded the families of Israel. Here is the holy nation come to sojourn in a strange land, yet having their identity clearly marked and able to preserve it. They will live in Egypt, yet not as Egyptians; they will hand on, even through bondage and oppression, the sacred inheritance of promise. They looked back to Canaan where their ancestors were buried, and forward to a time when they should return thither with greater knowledge and power than they now enjoyed. Thus it was that God educated His people, filled them with sacred memories and cheerful hopes, upheld them in their present exile with thoughts of a lasting home.

28. And he sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to direct his face unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. 29. And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. 30. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.

What passed at this meeting we are not further told. What memories of old time, what expressions of gratitude to God, what hopes of future mercies filled the conversation between Jacob and Joseph, we know not. Tears expressed more than words; but Jacob declared himself ready to die, now that he had his dear son once more with him. Death could have no terrors for him now

Joseph's glory, power, forethought were enough for him to confide in and rest all anxieties upon. So Christians feel as regards their Divine Lord. They know not the mystery of death, but are content to trust in their Redeemer, Who Himself died and yet is alive for evermore.

31. And Joseph said unto his brethren, and unto his father's house, I will go up, and shew Pharaoh, and say unto him, My brethren, and my father's house, which were in the land of Canaan, are come unto me ;

I listen here to the words of one greater than Joseph, Who says, 'Go unto My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father, My God and your God.' Who is it Who is the Mediator for His brethren, Who speaks for them, obtains for them benefits from the Throne? It is He Whom His brethren renounced and sold, yet Who ever lives to plead for them.

32. And the men are shepherds, for their trade hath been to feed cattle ; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have. 33. And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, What is your occupation? 34. That ye shall say, Thy servants' trade hath been about cattle from our youth even until now, both we, and also our fathers : that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen ; for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians.

'Remain,' says Joseph, 'in your simple life ; keep away from the court, from the temples of the Egyptians ; let the barrier of your despised occupation remain.' Joseph was desirous to prevent his brothers aiming at high places through his means ; he would have them live as a people apart, awaiting God's destinies for them. Yet he would not have them vaunt themselves as the chosen seed, the future lords of Canaan. Let them rather keep to themselves those high thoughts. It would be enough for them to have pasture for their cattle, a space in which to live, and work, and pray. So let us spend our time while we are in Egypt, as not of it, as having our own inward life apart. We are heirs of a faith and hope which the world does not share.

CHAPTER XLVII

1. Joseph presenteth five of his brethren, 7. and his father, before Pharaoh
11. He giveth them habitation and maintenance. 13. He getteth all the Egyptians' money, 16. their cattle, 18. their lands to Pharaoh. 22. The priests' land was not bought. 23. He letteth the land to them for a fifth part. 28. Jacob's age. 29. He sweareth Joseph to bury him with his fathers.

THEN Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, *My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and behold, they are in the land of Goshen. 2. And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh.*

'They are come,' he said, 'trusting in thy bounty, O king; they have no resources of their own, but rely on thy favour. I rank myself with these five, and then half my family are present here, as a pledge of the rest. I willingly lay aside my unique position to rank myself with the other sons of Jacob.' Joseph reminds me here, as often, of One Who is not ashamed to call us brethren, to pray for us and in us, to present us with Him to our heavenly Father. In Him we dare to approach the Throne of grace.

3. And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers. 4. They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen.

Pharaoh wanted no idle subjects, particularly in this time of distress, but he welcomed all those who could bring to Egypt useful knowledge and skill. And the sons of Jacob told him they were shepherds; that craft was all their care and employment. They did not expect to live in towns or to become rich and mighty; sufficient for them was this homely work, which had been that of their fathers before them. Nor did they mean to become citizens of Egypt. No, it would not be their lasting home. God might have other designs for them in the future. O Lord, I too am contented to regard this short life as a sojourn; I will take times of famine patiently; I will profit by the green pastures of Goshen when my way lies there; I will do my work heartily, but yet keep in mind Thy eternal home, which is my true end.

5. *And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee :* 6. *The land of Egypt is before thee ; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell ; in the land of Goshen let them dwell : and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle.*

It would seem that Pharaoh regretted the poor estimation in which pastoral life was held by the Egyptians. He felt that his own cattle suffered from it, and he was glad that these Hebrews should improve things. Pharaoh has a care for his sheep, and considers to whom he will intrust them. He desires industrious and capable men for the purpose. And will not my heavenly Father require an account of Christ's sheep at my hands? Will He not ask whether I have fed, have tended, have guarded those dear souls whom His Providence has put into my care?

7. *And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh : and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.*

Jacob thanked Pharaoh for all his favours, wished him all manner of blessings, humbled himself before him, and expressed his full trust in his sovereign care. All these thoughts are included in the words 'Jacob blessed Pharaoh.' He knew that he would be well received for Joseph's sake ; that gave him courage to draw near. What a comfort for me to have a Mediator with God, one so influential, so dear to the Divine Majesty ! Trusting in such a Patron I present to God my thanks, my praise, my prayers. I offer myself to fulfill His gracious will in all things.

8. *And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?* 9. *And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years : few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.* 10. *And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.*

'Few and evil days'; and yet his had been a very long life, and one variously blessed and favoured. Why did he look back on his life as a mere pilgrimage, and that short and sad? Indeed mortality is our lot ; a very long life and a short one are much the same when they draw towards the end. 'Pulvis et umbra sumus.' A few years after we die our memory is forgotten, our place in the world quite filled up. This is a 'transitory life,' not without

some rich tokens of mercy, some good hopes of blessings to come, but yet passed in a fallen world, with a body and mind that soon fail, with hopes and plans that mostly disappoint us.

11. *And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.*

12. *And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families.*

Here are Joseph's family settled in the land. Even in famine time they find some pasture. What they lack, his care supplies. They soon forget the great straits they were in at home, now that they are under so mighty and bountiful a Protector. These shepherds can say with the Psalmist, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing. He feeds me in a green pasture. He makes me to lie down by refreshing waters.' Joseph, who has public duties and the care of the kingdom upon him, yet never forgets his brethren or fails to supply their need.

13. *And there was no bread in all the land ; for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine.* 14. *And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought : and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.*

We are in great need ; we long for truth, peace, light, and cannot find them except with the true Joseph. He has abundant store ; but, then, His price is high. He says, 'Knowledge rather than choice gold,' 'Wisdom is better than rubies.' He says, 'Whosoever forsaketh not all that he hath cannot be My disciple.' He says, 'Sell all that thou hast, and follow Me.' Those who trust Him will find that they have bargained wisely. He has that for us which is worth more than gold.

15. *And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread : for why should we die in thy presence ? for the money faileth.* 16. *And Joseph said, Give your cattle ; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fail.* 17. *And they brought their cattle unto Joseph : and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for horses, and for the flocks, and for the*

cattle of the herds, and for the asses: and he fed them with bread for all their cattle for that year.

Nay, He needs more than our gold. He would have us put ourselves wholly into His hands. We must do no work now in our own strength. It is He from Whom come grace and strength, thoughts of good, and power to carry them out. It is hard, but necessary, that if I am to accomplish any good, it must be by daily seeking it in prayer, winning it by humble waiting at the Throne. Once I looked on myself as rich enough. I had wit, ability, means, to influence others and sway the world; now I feel my own nothingness. Power is in the hands of my dear Lord alone. His strength is perfected in my weakness.

18. *When that year was ended, they came unto him the second year, and said unto him, We will not hide it from my lord, how that our money is spent; my lord also hath our herds of cattle; there is not ought left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands: 19. Wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolate. 20. And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh's.*

Joseph will not be content with my means or my talents, He wants myself. I must become a servant to the Great King, lose my own liberty, and be content to move and live at the Royal pleasure. Here are His words, strange words too, 'If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.' He (through the Apostle) declares, 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.' When I have confessed this, He is my gracious Lord, and makes my service into perfect freedom.

21. *And as for the people, he removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof. 22. Only the land of the priests bought he not; for the priests had a portion assigned them of Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them: wherefore they sold not their lands.*

The idolatrous priests of Egypt escaped Joseph's administration. They were in no need of provision, they remained unaffected by

the plan whereby he put the land into Pharaoh's hands. Looking at the substance, at the reality of which this circumstance is the figure, I ask, Is this a happy condition? Is it well for souls to remain outside Christ's grace, to think to go to God without Him, to retain a show of freedom, to rely on human strength apart from the Cross? Better to live under Joseph's rule and trust His goodness.

23. *Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, here is seed for you, and ye shall sow the land.* 24. *And it shall come to pass in the increase, that ye shall give the fifth part unto Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own, for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones.* 25. *And they said, Thou hast saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants.* 26. *And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh's.*

Now, we are bound to thank our Lord for His goodness. He has saved us, and we can now both live and work. He supplies us bountifully with grace and comfort. He bids us sow the same faith widely, and it will be our support and that of our brethren. Our earthly circumstances may have changed for the worse, but we all the more look to Him. We are now able to join in the song, 'Thou hast redeemed us by Thy Blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation.' Oh that we may realise this happy condition, and be ready to venture all and endure all in gratitude to that saving mercy which has never forgotten us! Under the Jewish law, a literal tithe was paid to the priests, but we will give God double as much, a fifth instead of a tenth, for ours is a service of the spirit, not the letter.

27. *And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly.*

Israel begins now to grow into a nation. They seem outwardly blended with the Gentiles. They are content under Joseph's patronage. They appear to have relinquished their great future; and yet God is preparing them for it. Their rest, no less than their wanderings, works out His designs. If for a while I seem, O Lord, plunged in the cares of Egypt, lost amid the crowd of those who worship this world's glories and charms, yet let me bear a

different heart. Let there ever remain in me a sense that I am Thine, that my best establishment here is but a temporary sojourn, that I am the heir of eternal hopes.

28. *And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years.* 29. *And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: 30. But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying-place. And he said, I will do as thou hast said.*

Jacob lived so long among his people in Egypt to teach them God's commandments and promises, to preserve them from being carried away by Egyptian idol-worship. But why was he so anxious about the place of his burial? Surely to one who believes in God all burial-places are the same. God well knows (as S. Monica says) whence to raise up our dust. She had once, her son tells us, been most anxious that her body should lie by her husband's in her own home; but as her faith grew greater she said, 'Let me be buried wherever I die—the judgment call will be heard everywhere alike.' I answer that Jacob wished to testify his firm adherence to God's promises. He knew that Canaan and a distant future of blessing would be his. He would keep his family from forgetting their promised inheritance—even his ashes should preach. He had shared Abraham's and Isaac's faith and hope, and his body, resting by theirs, should declare this.

31. *And he said, Swear unto me. And he sware unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.*

Joseph is asked to swear, though his love and word were not doubtful for a moment. He is desired to appeal to the Living God to Whom all things are present, Who can raise up the dead, Who is the God of dead and living. Before this God, in His Presence, Joseph vowed he would lay his father's bones in the patriarchal sepulchre, and thus testify to his people the firm confidence which his father and he himself had in the immutability of the promises. I too believe in the same God to Whom they appealed. I too am a sharer in a great hope one day to be revealed. My very body will participate in it.

CHAPTER XLVIII

1. Joseph with his sons visiteth his sick father. 2. Jacob strengtheneth himself to bless them. 3. He repeateth the promise. 5. He taketh Ephraim and Manasseh as his own. 7. He telleth Joseph of his mother's grave. 9. He blesseth Ephraim and Manasseh. 17. He preferreth the younger before the elder. 21. He prophesieth their return to Canaan.

AND it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2. And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed.

I do not refuse sudden death, if it be God's will. Preparation for death may be made while I am in full health; but yet if the choice were given, I should prefer my end to be like Jacob's, with full foresight, with opportunity to prepare, to bless God, to look backward over life, to give a word of admonition to my dear ones.

'I would the light of reason, Lord,
Up to the last might shine,
That my own hands might hold my soul
Until it passed to Thine.'

Yet, after all, I am in Thy hands always, and what end Thou appointest will be best.

3. And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, 4. And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people: and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession.

Jacob's mind goes back to the vision and promise of old time. He says no word of his decaying health, or of his life in Egypt, but lets us see what had been deepest in his heart all through life. He recalls the time of his loneliness, his apprehensions, his poverty, and how a Divine manifestation had come to him and glorified his nothingness with rich and marvellous promises. 'How good,' he said, 'has God been to me—how sure is His word—how faithful a friend He is to the soul that trusts Him! Can death (so he ponders) break off altogether such a communion once entered into between God and a believer?'

5. *And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.* 6. *And thy issue, which thou begetteth after them, shall be thine, and shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance.*

Jacob raises Ephraim and Manasseh into the number of the tribes of Israel, and assigns them due portions of the inheritance. God had promised Canaan to him; it was his by right, though only to be possessed in the dim future, and he left it to be divided among his children. He was able by farseeing wisdom to fill up the place which would be left vacant by Levi having 'no portion nor inheritance with his brethren.' The chosen land should thus be divided among twelve tribes, and twelve only. As surely as Jacob knew the number of the tribes, so God knows the number of His chosen. To Him all things are present. Our future is hidden in His hand. Nothing can rob us of the eternal promises. If we are but faithful, what power can tear us from Him?

7. *And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Beth-lehem.*

Rachel had died prematurely, leaving Jacob but two children. Now he augments that number by adding Joseph's sons to the sacred family. No doubt in the old days he had shared with Rachel his faith and hope, had talked with her about God's designs; and yet she entered the Holy Land only to find a grave there. Will there not be a place where yearnings will find satisfaction, where a little dust will no longer choke the highest aspirations of the heart? O light, O peace, O purity, O union of true hearts, there is on earth no room for you, but will not eternity yield space enough? Jacob looked back, over long years, to his dear wife's death, and for her sake blessed and honoured Joseph and his sons.

8. *And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said, Who are these?* 9. *And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, bring them. I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them.*

As Joseph answered, so the prophet speaks, 'Behold I and the children whom God hath given me'; and both these answers figure the union of Christ Jesus with us, how that we belong to Him and have a share in His inheritance. Joseph felt that he

had been sold and consigned to death, but that God had raised him up, given him a bride from the Gentiles, given him heirs, brought them to inherit with himself the promised blessings. In all this he typifies that true Son Who went through suffering to glory, and Who makes room for us with Him.

10. Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near unto him: and he kissed them, and embraced them. 11. And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face: and lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed. 12. And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.

Jacob desired to pass on to Joseph's children the blessings which he had himself received. He would make them enter the covenant of promise. They should now be God's children, and regard Him as their Father. Perhaps visions of Gospel promises came to them with this dying benediction, dim thoughts of Him Who should come to bless, not Jacob's house only, but all the world. That love and power of God which they knew was a token of yet greater mercies to come.

13. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him. 14. And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn.

Here is a blessing conveyed by laying-on of hands with prayer. Such is the ancient custom of believers, which the Church of Christ has received and continues. But on this occasion Jacob imparts the blessing with his hands crossed, as if in figure of that Cross by which the blessing should come; and choosing the younger before the elder, as if foretelling that those who should come to the faith last should surpass their predecessors. It is reasonable on this grave occasion to look for mysteries. Joseph stands in the place of Him Who was sold, betrayed, glorified. Manasseh and Ephraim, the elder and younger sons, represent those Jews who first believed in Christ, or shall believe later on. Jacob represents the patriarchs and prophets welcoming those converts whom Christ brings to join their blessed society. Faith thus looks on beyond the letter, and loves to find hints of mysteries to be unfolded hereafter.

15. *And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before Whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day,* 16. *The Angel Which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.*

Faithful Shepherd, do Thou feed me; tried Friend of souls, do Thou befriend me; Giver of blessing, let me prove Thy blessing true. Thou hast guarded me through many dangers, restored me from many downfalls, loaded me with comforts and mercies. I indeed have wandered like a sheep that is lost, but Thy goodness did not forget me when I forgot Thee. Let me live and die in this faith, worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the true and living God, Who was with His people in old time, but has now come nearer still in the person of His dear Son. I march in the ranks of those who from the beginning have held this faith. I look to the reward which they looked to.

17. *And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head.* 18. *And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn: put thy right hand upon his head.* 19. *And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.* 20. *And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh.*

Yes, Ephraim became the greater in after-time. Ephraim gave kings to Israel in the line of Jeroboam. Ephraim gave a name to the nation of Israel as distinct from Judah; and yet that pre-eminence was not blest, it involved separation from David's line, and from the temple of the true God. I would rather find in this greater honour of Ephraim a token of things yet to come, when the latter end of Jews shall be better than their beginning, when many shall have their eyes opened to see in Mary's Son their Hope and King, when fervent Christians of Abraham's line shall recall saints of old; what S. Paul has in his mind when he says, 'What shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?' Blessings of temporal headship and wealth, if these are meant,

are little compared to the great blessing of faith in Christ Jesus. May I and those I love obtain this and never part with it !

21. *And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers.*

I have but a few moments to live, but faith can never die. I shall disappear and turn to dust, but my God, Who is your God too, lives and reigns. I shall be gathered to my fathers ; but they await the fulfilment of the promise. Though dead, they live in God's sight. My fathers believed and hoped as I do. They served the living God, and knew that they had entered into an eternal covenant with Him. Canaan was to them a pledge and sign of what 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived.'

22. *Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.*

In the 'place of Sichem' God had appeared to Abraham and said, 'To thy seed will I give this land'; and he had raised there the first altar of the true God which that land ever saw. Jacob had bought that same spot, and hallowed it with renewed worship, and had regained it by arms from the Amorites who sought to rob him of it. In that place Joseph himself was to be buried. There too Our Lord came and sat wearied by Jacob's well, and spoke to the Samaritan woman about the living water. He won that land again for the faith by His Apostolic missionaries (Acts viii.), when the magician had usurped His place. Is not that region holy ground, where Old Testament saints prayed, and worked, and rested, and which the Lord Himself hallowed by His Presence? And yet in that very place Our Lord took pains to teach us that true worshippers can worship the Father acceptably in every place, so it be 'in spirit and in truth.'

CHAPTER XLIX

1. Jacob calleth his sons to bless them. 3. Their blessing in particular.
29. He chargeth them about his burial. 33. He dieth.

AND Jacob called unto his sons, and said, *Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.* 2. *Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.*

Jacob, though dying, assumes the aspect of a prophet and of a judge. He looks into the future, he searches hearts, he assigns punish-

ment and reward. He already views his descendants as settled in the land, knows what region will belong to each and the character of it. Here we find the root of the firm persuasion with which the desert-wandering tribes sang—

‘Comrades, what our sires have told us,
Watch and wait, for it will come.’

It is to me a great evidence of immortality to behold just before dissolution love, insight, wisdom, hope, all in full exercise, all in perfection, while the frail body is already worn out. Will not at death the voyager step from his boat and pass on elsewhere?

3. Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: 4. Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.

Reuben threw away his glory, the double portion, the right to command that should have been his. He chose instead the gratification of his sinful passion. How many young men have done just the same! They have degraded their souls and bodies, and awoke too late to find themselves covered with shame, or ruined in health and hope. To Reuben nothing was sacred. He polluted his father's wife, and did not fear his father's curse; but he found too late that God's laws avenge themselves, even if human justice is silent.

5. Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. 6. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. 7. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

Simeon and Levi heard, but replied not; they were silent; they had no word to justify their violence. Jacob desired once more to disclaim any share in it. To him the treachery, the cruelty, the rapacity of his sons were alike hateful. It was not thus he was to gain possession of the promises; his Divine Guide did not lead him such a way as this. But their false zeal has found many imitators. Many have thought that violence could advance God's kingdom, that the most holy Name could be glorified by persecuting unbelievers or heretics. From such grievous mistakes may God's goodness keep me!

8. *Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee.* 9. *Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?* 10. *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.* 11. *Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.* 12. *His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.*

Judah should be victorious and royal like the king of beasts. Vineyards and pastures should be his portion. So Jacob foretells; but he leads my thoughts on to 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah' Who conquered for us, to the slain Lamb Who receives power and honour and glory. 'His kingdom is that which shall not be destroyed.' He stooped down and humbled Himself, but it was that He might win the victory. He came when His people were about to lose all their temporal glory, that He might bring them a surer staff on which to lean. His garments were 'dipped in blood.' He turned the vinegar and gall into a cup of blessing. This is a different kind of empire and glory and splendour from what Judah would discern in Jacob's words, but it is one that lasts on, while earthly sceptres rust and break.

13. *Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for a haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon.*

The inheritance of Zebulun, here described as near to the shore of the Mediterranean, and profitable therefore for trade, came out to him by lot (Joshua xix. 10), thus fulfilling Jacob's prophecy. So God orders what seems to us mere chance. He knows how to fulfil His word. That sea near which Zebulun dwelt was then a barrier parting nations, but in after days it became a bridge over which the knowledge of the Gospel passed rapidly from land to land. That was better merchandise than Sidon in old times knew of.

14. *Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens;* 15. *And he saw that rest was good, and the land*

that it was pleasant ; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.

Rest rather than the toil and pain of war, slavery rather than a brave effort to shake off the yoke and be free. Such was to be Issachar's lot. The rich pleasant country where he lived made up to him for almost perpetual bondage to this or that foreign power. How often in life we prefer our ease to God's service and our brethren's good ! How often we allow idle habits to rule over us and become our tyrants, and then too late find out in what slavery we are !

16. *Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.*

17. *Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.*

Dan's warlike gifts and strategy against encompassing foes are foretold here, such prowess as emerged in the hero Samson. But when I read of the humble serpent crushed beneath the horse's hoofs and yet biting him, so that he throws his rider, I see noted the marvel of God's victories wrought through unlikely means. Samson's strength lay in his hair ; he fought and overcame almost alone and without weapons. When blind, despised, a captive, he slew more than in his best days. Thus it is God's way to overcome the mighty by the weak, to overthrow by the despised Cross all the world's glory. Our Saviour's deepest humiliation was the weapon whereby He triumphed.

18. *I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.*

Let this verse be mine. I know that ' with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption.' I do not expect deliverance from evil and misery through my own efforts, my own confidence. Human learning and ability cannot bring it me. Far be it from me to despise the efforts towards good of any brave and aspiring heart, but yet they cannot succeed except by Divine aid, Divine mercy. I wait for Him to bring salvation Who humbled Himself to our dust that He might exalt us to Himself. Looking onward over the achievements of his descendants, Jacob felt that there was somewhat further needed, somewhat more than power of man could accomplish, a victory of grace in comparison with which earthly victories would seem nothing.

19. *Gad, a troop shall overcome him : but he shall overcome at the last.*

Here is a state of war, defeat and victory following each other—a state in which marauders are expected, but victoriously resisted.

Here is figured the condition of good Christians who are assaulted by Satan with all manner of temptations, who lead a harassed anxious life, but never give up their trust in Christ the Conqueror, never cease contending against vice and unbelief. In such their victorious Lord fights, to such He gives a crown.

20. *Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.*

What is that true Bread full of sweetness, that royal banquet at which the elect feed? It was from Nazareth it issued forth to be the sustenance of true souls. Let me ever adoringly and thankfully feed upon It, both in sacramental means and in Gospel words, and in meditations on the Passion, wherein It was broken for my use. Do not suppose, dear friend, that that Divine supply is exhausted or has lost its savour. No; it will suffice till the world's end.

21. *Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words.*

Who are those whose feet are 'beautiful upon the mountains,' who 'bring glad tidings of good things'? The prophet in vision saw and heard them, they told 'how the Lord had redeemed Sion.' Who are they who speed with extreme swiftness over sea and land announcing Christ's Resurrection? In the men of Naphtali, so swift and so full of good tidings, I see shadowed forth Christ's Apostles, who had the best of all news to bring, and so soon made distant lands partakers of it.

22. *Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall.* 23. *The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him:* 24. *But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)* 25. *Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:* 26. *The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.*

O Shepherd of Israel! O Rock of our Salvation! Who didst triumph through suffering and death, Who didst rescue the world

through the very means which Thine enemies devised to destroy Thee, do Thou strengthen us in our hour of trial, turn curses into blessings for us, give us the best of all blessings—a heart at peace with Thee. Jacob had had blessings handed down to him from his fathers, he had experienced many blessings in his own life, even troubles had turned for him into blessings, and all this inheritance of trust and thankfulness he passed on to those who came after him. Do not think that the patriarchs merely craved for fruitful earth, teeming flocks, prosperous seasons. Oh no; these were but signs of a better blessing.

27. Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.

Benjamin should be a brave and warlike tribe, terrible to their enemies, fierce and intractable in disposition. King Saul and his warriors (1 Sam. xxii. 6-7) came of that tribe. Saul, too, the persecutor, carried on the tribal tradition of courage. He raged fiercely against Christians, and spared no pains to extirpate them. What a wonderful work of grace it was when God turned the wolf into a lamb, took away his scornful, fierce, unbelieving heart, and made him a model of tenderness and charity. He was still a zealous warrior and won marvellous victories, but it was in Christ's cause and with His peaceful weapons.

28. All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.

Here are twelve blessings, for even the first three have something of blessing concealed behind reproofs. Jacob pronounces them as judge and as prophet, looking on into the far future, discerning the character and fortunes of the tribes which should bear the name of each son. The tribes are twelve, and that remains the number of completion under which the Church is considered whether in Old Testament or in New Testament. The gates of the mystical city in Revelation xxi. are twelve; its foundations are twelve; the holy elders who sit on thrones around the Throne of God in Revelation iv. are twice twelve; the Christians of Jewish birth are welcomed in Revelation vii. as twelve times twelve thousand. Pondering over those figures, I learn, that in spite of man's failures God perfects and completes His Church, and I am confident that what He has begun He will finish in due time. I learn to be one in heart with believers, both of the Old and New Testament; their God is my God, their hope my hope. Let me so live and die that I may inherit the same blessing which they found.

29. *And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,* 30. *In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying-place.* 31. *There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.* 32. *The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth.*

Jacob was to be 'gathered unto his people.' He left his children to rejoin his fathers; his soul would associate with their souls, his body lie by their bodies. He desired to testify in his last dispositions his sure faith that Canaan would be one day holy to the true God, filled with His praises, famous for His marvels. He would have the faith of Abraham and Isaac be ever present in the minds of his descendants. Thus it was they had lived, had hoped, had prayed, had died; let all true believers follow their pattern. The Law of Moses, which came in afterwards with its precepts and restrictions, could not annihilate the promises which had preceded it.

33. *And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.*

Look back over Jacob's long life and consider its lessons. His birth had its accompanying predictions. The blessing was strangely made over to him, God overruling to good even Jacob's craft and his father's mistake. Then he had years of exile and hard service, then a troublous and endangered return home. His life in Canaan was filled with sorrows. At the end of his life a joyful gleam of comfort appeared. Yet through all God's Presence did not leave him, nor His blessing fail him. He had hope in his death, possessed his soul to the last, died with perfect tranquillity and sure faith. Jacob's God is mine; He is no less strong, faithful, merciful than Jacob found Him.

CHAPTER L

1. The mourning for Jacob. 4. Joseph getteth leave of Pharaoh to go to bury him. 7. The funeral. 14. Joseph comforteth his brethren, who craved his pardon. 22. His age. 23. He seeth the third generation of his sons. 24. He prophesieth unto his brethren of their return. 25. He taketh an oath of them for his bones. 26. He dieth and is chested.

AND *Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him.*

'Farewell, dear father; so many years we have gone along life's journey together, so many services and comforts I have received from thee, so many memories I have of my childish days and thy love. Thou and I passed seventeen years of love and duty together at the beginning of my life, seventeen also at the end of thine; nor in the lonely years between did we forget each other.' Such thoughts were in Joseph's mind, but he wept 'not as those who have no hope.' He remembered that the God of Jacob still lived, though Jacob had passed away. He discerned the guiding hand of God visible over his father and himself.

2. *And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel.*
3. *And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days.*

Egypt was the land where the science of the grave was studied most.

The thoughts of the Egyptians turned much on the life after death, and they had invented an art of preserving even the lifeless bodies as far as might be in their former perfectness. Long ceremonious mourning, funeral offerings, the embalming of the corpse, kept the dead in mind. They strove to picture his journey to the other world, his appearance before the Unseen Judge. Yet how easily all this became superstitious, how little effect it had on the actions and character of the living! Moses by Divine inspiration cast it all aside and struck out a truer way, bidding men devote their living days to God's love and service, and not pry much into the condition of the departed.

4. *And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh,*

saying, 5. *My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die: in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again.* 6. *And Pharaoh said, Go up, and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear.*

Joseph addressed his request with great humility, as wishing to show his dependence upon Pharaoh and Pharaoh's advisers; and perhaps the garb of mourning which he wore prevented him from drawing near the king's presence. Pharaoh graciously granted his request. How different from the Pharaoh of Moses' time, several hundred years later! Then believers sought in vain for the king's consent to their leaving Egypt, and God had to bring them out by many marvels. Yet He in Whose hand are the hearts of kings ordered both answers, both fell into the good order of His Providence.

7. *And Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt,* 8. *And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen.* 9. *And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company.*

This great and splendid funeral procession passed over the desert and stopped at the edge of the Promised Land. It makes me think of the Exodus when the 'bannered lines' of Israel passed over the same route on their way to conquer the land. The entry of Jacob's funeral procession seems to me like a ceremonious anticipation of the entry of his descendants on their long-promised inheritance. And, perhaps, another entry still remains to be accomplished. Has God still in store for His chosen people a recovery of their old home, a reunion with the faith and hope of the Patriarchs, an inheritance among Christ's people? Many believers have thought so and hoped so.

10. *And they came to the threshingfloor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days.* 11. *And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abel-mizraim, which is beyond Jordan.*

This solemn and ceremonious lamentation, of which the tradition long remained among the wondering Canaanites who witnessed it,

expressed the duty of the Egyptians towards Joseph and their kindly regards for Jacob's memory. Joseph's heart was comforted by the love and honour shown to his dear father. Yet I for my part greatly deprecate a ceremonious funeral. When I am laid in earth, let everything speak of hope and peace, not unmingled with awe; let some kind soul say a prayer or give me a tear. But let the world's pomp and vanity be kept away from my lifeless body when my soul has been summoned before the Judge.

12. And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them: 13. For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a burying-place of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre.

The actual burial of Jacob was performed by his sons alone, the Egyptian retinue being left at a distance. They laid their father's body in the sacred earth and closed up the cave, nor have any human remains been added since to those already there. The veneration of after ages has built it over, and walled it round. The Israelites, when they entered Canaan, and believers ever since, have revered the spot. From that grave God will one day raise up with their bodies those who first loved and trusted Him in the old time. What if scarcely any dust of them is left, yet their God is living and true; He Who made the world and gave life to creatures knows how to remake them.

14. And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father. 15. And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. 16. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying,

Joseph's brothers had been forgiven, and had enjoyed many pledges of their brother's good-will, yet the remembrance of their old fault will not let them be at ease. They feel it more now than they did at first. They are like those forgiven and converted souls who yet fear God's judgment, and are confounded by the remembrance of their iniquities, not without hope;

'Who day by day and year by year
Survey the past with deepening fear,
Yet hourly with more hopeful cheer
To the dim future turn, the absolving Voice abide.'

17. *So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin ; for they did unto thee evil : and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.*

This is a strong plea for pardon. If Joseph had been other than he was, if he had cherished a remembrance of his brothers' cruelty, he must still have felt its weight. Amidst a scoffing world we are united in serving the true God ; both we and you believe and fear and hope ; all this is a treasure we have in common ; how then can we bear malice to each other or strive to repay injury ? Does not a common faith, a common approach to God's altar, a common remembrance of Christ's atoning love mean something ? Surely it should have power to wipe out the memory of wrongs received. Both we and you have been forgiven the ten thousand talents by Divine Mercy. Shall we stick at the hundred pence which stands for human injustice ?

18. *And his brethren also went and fell down before his face ; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants.* 19. *And Joseph said unto them, Fear not ; for am I in the place of God ?* 20. *But as for you, ye thought evil against me ; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*

O good Providence of God, turning evil to good, out of the poison of men's malice compounding healthful draughts of mercy and peace ! In the Providence of God all events, how disordered soever, have a most perfect rule and order. He brought about Joseph's exaltation, Joseph's munificence, the benefits wrought by his foresight and wisdom, through his brothers' cruel act. Nor less does He watch over our lives, turning to our good affronts, temptations, unjust accusations ; designing, by all the roughnesses of life, by all the waves that buffet us, to prepare us for His eternal kingdom.

21. *Now therefore fear ye not : I will nourish you and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.*

O true Joseph, I see that what men's malice wrought against Thee did but fulfil the prophecies that went before, did but prepare a saving ransom for us ! In the bitter agonies of Thy cruel Passion I recognise man's injustice, but in the result of it Divine mercy only. Now Thou speakest unto us 'comfortable words,' invitest us to draw near without fear, and enjoy for ever the riches of Thy mercy. We will trust Thee with ourselves for life and for eternity.

22. *And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house : and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years.* 23. *And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation : the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees.*

Here is a gracious and peaceful old age, with all honour and love accompanying. Here are words and thoughts of good handed on to successive generations. Joseph's long life was passed in the discharge of duty ; he found comfort in his children, his grandchildren, his great-grandchildren. He was able to unite together old and young in a common faith and hope. No doubt all these mercies carried his thoughts yet further onward, and made him say, 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me,' or 'This God shall be our guide unto death.'

24. *And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die : and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.* 25. *And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.*

Your true Protector lives, though I am gone. Your best of friends remains, He lives and reigns. His Name, His promise, His word stands sure. Do not fear, though a new world rises round you, new discoveries, new forces, for your God 'abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself.' Joseph left his bones to be borne before Israel on their march, as a pledge of his sure confidence that his people should enter the promised land. My Master has left me a better sign, a living remembrance, a sure pledge of everlasting life. When I adore and receive It, I recognise that what He promised is true.

26. *So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old : and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.*

So Joseph died. So Genesis ends. So the faith and hope of the chosen race recedes into the darkness for a while. And yet it will spring forth, bud, and blossom when God's hour comes. Remember that with Him a thousand years are as one day. He takes long ages to work out His Divine plan. Look at any of the reforms and improvements that have been wrought for men's

minds or bodies ; over what long periods, over what difficulties and drawbacks, they had to make their way, and yet the time for them came at last, and the man to carry out the work. So Thou, O God, dealest with Thy people. Thou biddest them, above all things, trust and wait. Those who commit their hope into Thy hands will not lose it.

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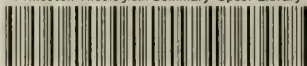
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